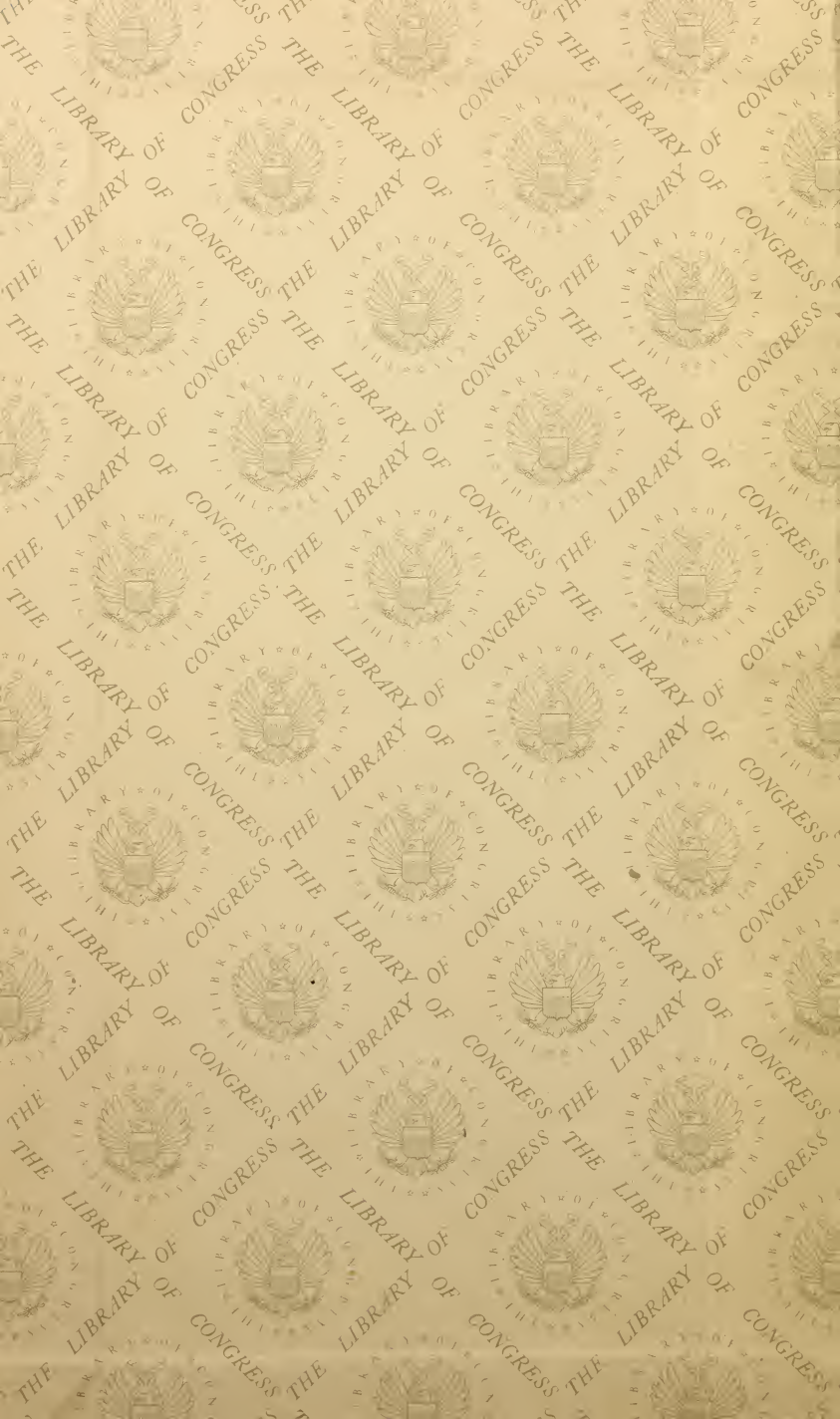
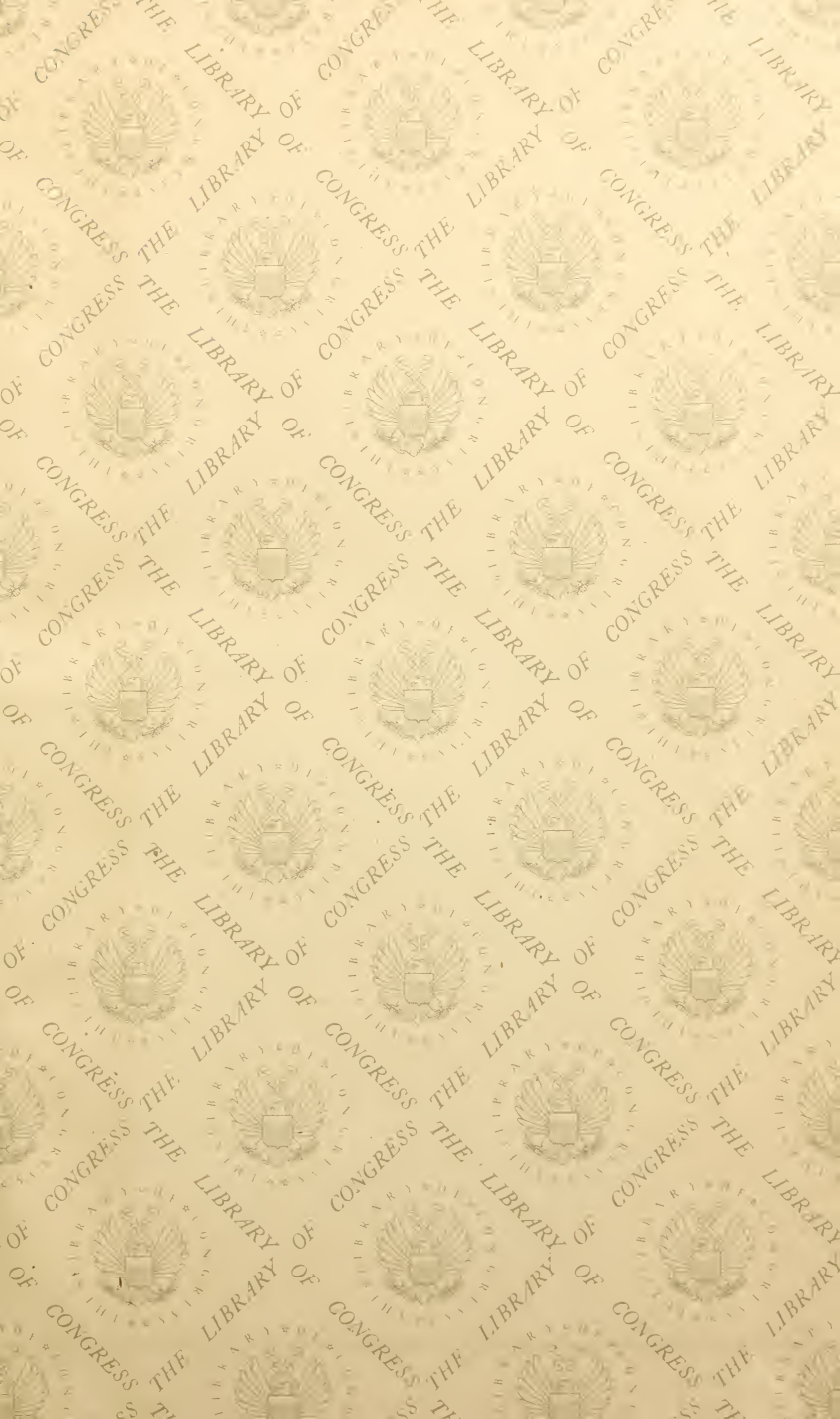


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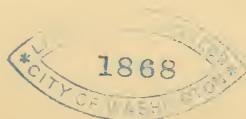


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# STUDIES IN CONDUCT.

SHORT ESSAYS

FROM THE 'SATURDAY REVIEW.'



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## NOTE.

THE title which has been given to the following collection of Essays does not perhaps describe all of them quite accurately. But it indicates, more or less exactly, the point of view from which they were all written. I can only add, in borrowed words, that *“If the subjects be slight, the treatise is short. The busy may find time, and the idle may find patience.”*



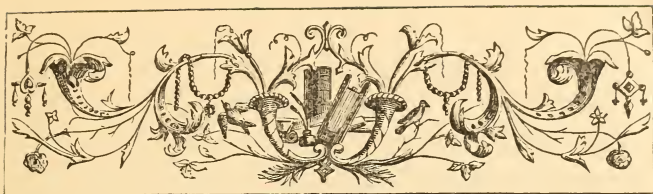
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## STUDIES IN CONDUCT.

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### I.

#### THE CAPACITY FOR PLEASURE.

**O**F the many extraordinary notions which constitute the distinctive characteristics of an average Englishman or Scotchman, none is more wonderful or more inveterate than the conviction that all pleasure is more or less a waste of time. Even educated men, who have shaken off most of the unreasonable prejudices which were instilled into them by the wise old ladies, with petticoats or without, who surrounded their youth, are constantly found to have retained the old view about pleasure. The most excellent persons of all sorts, differing in pretty nearly every other point, and representing the most opposite sides of human cha-

racter, agree in looking upon pleasure as at most a necessary evil, incident to our fallen race. First of all, there is the great Immortal-Soul argument, occasionally used by religious professors of every shade. Is it worthy of an immortal being to dance the *deux-temps*, or play a rubber of whist, or look at another immortal being trying to break his neck on a trapeze? Then there are those foes of pleasure who take up the serious line brought into fashion in education by Mrs. Hannah More. We all remember how that fearful and wonderful person, Cœlebs in Search of a Wife, was disgusted with the vapid and frivolous talk of all the young ladies he met with, and how the people who mixed in society were called "the mingled mass which celebrate the orgies of dissipation." Racing is "a turbulent and unnatural diversion;" while even clubs are "subversive of private virtue and domestic happiness." There cannot, Hannah More allows, be an amusement more entirely harmless in itself than the practice of frequenting public walks and gardens on a Sunday. "But," she adds, "I must appeal to the honest testimony of our own hearts, if the effect be favourable to seriousness; do we commonly retire from these places with the impressions which were made on us at church in their full force?" If she had survived to our time, she might, on the same principle, have appealed to the honest testimony of

their own hearts, whether young ladies can receive in their full force the monitions of the amiable curate with whom on the previous afternoon they had been engaged in playing croquet. Croquet, moreover, innocent as it appears to us, would in her opinion have been a monstrous and disorderly piece of libertinism. For, of all the wicked vanities of this world, love of dress is the most wicked, and for a lady to show any portion of herself except her face and her hands is to be immodest and disgusting. The display of ankles and balmorals incidental to croquet condemns that popular pastime, on the old theory, to the level of the most abandoned of their sex. Would it not be a fitter employment for serious beings in their hours of ease to chat lightly over the backslidings of the ancient Jews, or the practices of the primitive Church, or to discuss the best means of training up righteous lady's-maids and godly hinds?

But it may be allowed that the once conclusive argument against all enjoyment, that it is inconsistent with the discharge of religious duties, has fallen into considerable disrepute. There are, it is true, numerous circles in which any relish for amusement is still taken for a symptom of a godless and unconverted heart. But these circles are every day becoming narrower and narrower, and even within the most contracted limits the range of allowable recreations is being extended—due care,

of course, being always taken to sanctify them with truly pious names and adjuncts. Yet, as one set of objections to pleasure loses its hold, others spring up to exercise the same influence. Just as theologians are giving up the rigid ascetic theory of life, the most active worldlings begin to admire it. Just as we have ceased to believe that pleasure is fatal to salvation, people start up to persuade us that it is fatal to getting on in the world. The active worldling is as ready to call every kind of amusement by the evil names of frivolity and stupid self-indulgence as the converted saint used to be. The tremendous making haste to be rich leaves neither much time nor much taste for diversions which do not seem in any way to lead up to the main object of life. And anybody whose resolute devotion to his work has stripped him of all personal interest in play always comes to think that play is only needful for "little people and for fools." A man who goes down to his mill all the year round at six in the morning, and keeps steadily at work until six or seven in the evening, when he is too tired to do anything except dine and tumble into bed, is universally allowed to be leading the most admirably rational existence in the world. If of these twelve hours he took, say, three, in which to read good books, or to study science or music or architecture, his friends would shake their heads, as over one who had just virtue enough to



make them honestly regret that he should thus throw away his chances—chances, that is to say, of making fifty thousand pounds instead of resting ignobly content with twenty. The modern condemnation of a man who falls away into a little recreation is less severe than that with such people were formerly visited. He is not sent to Coventry, nor told that he is on the road to ruin in this world and to perdition in the next. But he is pretty sure to pass for a frivolous dilettante, and to be called flashy and conceited. He ranks as a second-rate sort of person, who is frittering away energies which might have made him a millionaire, in exercises which will only have the comparatively pitiful effect of making him a man of knowledge, refinement, and taste.

The coarser pleasures are, fortunately, no longer popular among educated people. There are plenty of fools left to patronize such of these pleasures as the law cannot reach; and casinos, gambling tents at Epsom, cock-fights in the country, are thronged with people whom a natural or acquired temperament effectively protects against the better influences of the time. Only among large classes of men, and even of women, there is nearly as little sympathy with pleasure in its highest sense as in its coarsest and lowest. The truly earnest are as hostile to pleasure as the truly pious. They take up one of two positions, and sometimes both.

They either insist that a man should make it his first and most urgent business to work hard to acquire wealth, or else they say that while there is so much misery and wickedness in the world we ought to have no heart for mere amusements, and the cultivation of finnickish tastes. The first is the favourite view of the man of practical energy and vulgar ambition. The second satisfies those who are too dull and fussy for anything but their so-called philanthropy. The people who care about nothing very much except growing rich naturally look on anybody who sacrifices this object, in order to get some share in the best pleasures which the world offers, as a sentimental fool. The others consider him horribly wicked and selfish. There is an odious complacency in the trick to which the relentless drudge is amazingly partial, of replying to anybody who talks to him about pleasure, that his pleasure is in unceasing work. As if unceasing work, passing every solid day in the counting-house, reading and answering hundreds of letters every week, keeping the mind uninterruptedly bent on business details and prospects, were an exhaustive and unimprovable system of life, beyond which the force of nature could not go. Only more strange than this is the delusion that the claims of relaxation are satisfied by spending a month out of the twelve at the seaside or on the Continent. To alternate a long

spell of excessive labour with a short spell of excessive repose is about as rational as to maintain that a man who takes a bottle of neat brandy one day, and a quart of water the next, has been drinking brandy and water. If it be sound doctrine that a line every day is the secret of success in art, it is not less true that an instalment of pleasure every day is at least one of the secrets of happiness in life. As it is, too many people are like the one-eyed beast who lived on the shore of the sea, and fancied that whatever peril he might be exposed to must approach him from the side of the water ; but while he kept his eye steadily fixed on the sea, he was suddenly devoured by an enemy who came stealthily upon him on the side of the land. It is the fashion to suppose that men can only have their moral nature dulled and debased by pleasure. In their affright at pleasure, they forget to take any precautions against being dulled and debased by excessive labour for a single object, which is only a worthy object when it is one of many.

From our school-days upwards we are taught, first by masters and discipline, and afterwards by the temper which we find prevailing in the world outside, that if anything is pleasant it is pretty sure to prove to be wrong. It is attempted to represent even cricket and foot-ball rather in their utilitarian aspects, as good for the body, just as

grammar is good for the soul, than as means of pleasure and enjoyment. The notion that pleasure as pleasure is a desirable thing is repugnant to the heart of the commonplace pedagogue. The theological idea that mortals are sent here as to a place of sore chastisement and mortification, has taken deep root. The more dull, difficult, and unintelligible a Latin grammar, the more suitable it is for the use of boys. All the most obviously uninteresting books are on that account the more creditable kind of reading. If a lad or a man be found poring over Milner's 'Church History,' he is well thought of, because it is dull and dismal; but if he were laughing over 'Pickwick' or 'Tom Jones,' nine people out of ten would declare him, in comparison with the disciple of Milner, to be wasting his time. That pleasure, amusement, mere recreation, thorough unbending, is a legitimate object of deliberate pursuit, is a truth pretty invariably disparaged, just because a man immoderately addicted to self-indulgence is a very bad sort of man. People do not seem to suspect that it is possible to be just as immoderately and evilly addicted to work as to indulgence, and that an equal amount, though of a different kind, of mischief may accrue to one's family from excess in one direction as in the other.

The proposition that all pleasant things are right is untrue, but it is certainly not so radically



untrue as the more popular proposition that most pleasant things are wrong. And the prevalence and popularity of the more untrue of these two absurdities has an especially mischievous effect. Its constant presence, exerting an influence of whose operation one is mostly unconscious, checks—and, if it be supported by other influences, such as a conviction that mirth is unscriptural, actually extinguishes—all blitheness and freedom of spirit. Why should not a jocund capacity for pleasure and enjoyment be as eagerly desired by parents and teachers as a capacity for remembering dates or names? It may be said that Nature settles the first, and that she only is responsible for it, whereas, though she may have to give one the faculty of memory in the first instance, it must be developed from without afterwards. As if Nature could be responsible for the cheerfulness and joyousness of a creature whom every care is habitually taken to depress.

This is the department in which the moral part of education has always been weakest, though vigorous attempts are occasionally made to strengthen it. That people should be trained and encouraged to be upright, self-controlling, industrious, and magnanimous, is never denied. But there is every bit as much reason why the faculty of being jolly, of finding an eager pleasure in all sorts of objects and pursuits, should be trained and encouraged.

An hilarious elasticity of nature is surely one of the most invaluable qualities anybody can have. Yet somehow the man who goes through the world with sober solemn jowl is always thought to be showing a deeper sense of the worth of life, and to be making more of his talents, than the elastic man. May we not reasonably wonder why?





## II.

### THE PAINS OF ASSOCIATION.



NERO used to curse and shun the scenes of his crimes, "because they could not change their faces, like the courtiers, to flatter him." Even people, who have not to torment them the recollection of such enormities as haunted Nero, may begin, after a certain time, to find that places have a stubborn unchangeableness about them which they would fain avoid. Considering that all of us who are not utterly dull and inanimate are constantly undergoing change, and that, even if our own stock of ideas and sentiments should, to our discredit, remain unaltered, yet the mere lapse of time outside of ourselves changes our point of view, it is plain that the comparative constancy of places is a something which jars on the unphilosophic mind. Of all the agreeable fancies that have gained room

among the stock sentiments of the world, that of there being some pleasure in renewing old associations with places is the most delusive. The constant breakdown in the fulfilment of anticipations of this sort is as much a commonplace as the anticipations themselves are. Men who have made a mark in the world are often pictured, by novelists and the modern fancy biographer, as revisiting the scenes of their youth, and moralizing over them with a gushing and hateful complacency. The truth is that most men who achieve any great success have by that time outgrown the inclination "to shed a tear of joy and thankfulness," as the phrase is, over the haunts of the past. During the thirty years or so which in most cases, even of success, elapse between youthful aspirations and their more or less perfect fulfilment, a man's mind is better engaged than in sentimental moralizings over the vicissitudes of mortal fortune; and when he has got time to recognize these vicissitudes and ponder over them, he has probably lost the inclination. It is mostly, we believe, sentimental young gentlemen and unmarried ladies under twenty who expatiate so beautifully upon the touching loveliness of early association. Perhaps one ought to be very much obliged to them for their sedulous efforts to keep us from being hardened by the world, and to recall to grown-up people the purity and simple-mindedness of their

earlier days. But contrasts between present and past, be they never so touching, are seldom very effective. When they are most violent—and, to have any effect at all, they must have a certain violence—they are simply acutely painful, and it may be questioned whether mere acute pain is ever good for much in morals. Supposing a man has the fortitude to run probes and lances deep into himself, merely for the sake of the pain they inflict, the reaction is sure to be too strong for him, and the pain and humiliation will most likely leave him worse, not better, than he was before. Clergymen who preach on behalf of Female Penitentiaries nearly always introduce a picture of the fallen woman reflecting with softened heart upon the old days when she clung about her mother's knees. It would be more true to nature and fact to represent the woman as hardened, not softened, by such reflections. A good many fallen women do not indulge in these retrospects at all, and those who do are often irresistibly driven by them to the solace of gin. It is a wholesome thing that men and women should smart for their backslidings, but smartings which result in a too profound depression of the moral system are the most dangerous discipline to which anybody can subject himself or others. The sting which is left by a revival of the old hopeful associations in the breast of a man whose life has been, or appears to himself to be, a failure,

more often makes him reckless than stimulates him to fresh endeavours. Hence the sight of the old school-house, or of the place where he was born, or of the church in which he was married, is not so much pathetic, as simply horrible to him, because it recalls in a vivid way a contrast which is pregnant with unalloyed pain. In the case of successful men with a warm emotional temperament, the places which revive old associations—that is to say, old hopes and ideas and exploits—are not downright odious, as they are to the little social Neros. But even here they are not so lovely as the young poetesses would have us think. A Lord Chancellor or an Archbishop, unless he has a very unusual amount of the unctuous affectation of dignitaries, is not at all moved to shed a joyful tear as he revisits the spot where he remembers that he thrashed an ill-conditioned schoolmate, or won his first prize, or even preached his first sermon. The philosopher who is supposed to have discovered the doctrine of the universal flux of things was himself usually to be found dissolved in tears. And one can scarcely wonder at him, though perhaps the habitual contemplation of so surpassingly dismal a truth might have been expected to breed that indifference which comes of familiarity with truths as with other things. The custodian of a ruin has not a tithe of the sensibility which affects the casual tourist; and so a phi-



philosopher who is for ever pointing out the crumbling ruins of human hopes might naturally come to look on his doctrine as a matter of business, and be no more moved by it than an undertaker or a mute is moved by the thought of mortality. Agreeable sentimentalists are to be met with who get quite hearty and cheerful over the contrasts of life, just as a mute does over a lively season. But the heartiness, in one case as in the other, is in a manner professional. Contrasts and vicissitudes constitute the regular stock in trade of a certain sort of moralists in poetry and prose.

Any hint that, after all, this use of violent contrast between a man's positions at different times is rather a clever trick than a broad and profitable reflection on life, is resented or despised as an intrusion of a hard matter-of-fact worldliness. People who are more sincerely sensible of the sorrowfulness of the contrasts which association brings out find the old proverbial thought that times change, while we are changed with them, by no means so pleasant as to be worth making much of. A pair of lovers in the honeymoon may find a certain luxury in being reminded, by the ruins of the Coliseum, or by hearing that some acquaintance has come to ruin, that man's life is but a span, that he is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, and that the vicissitudes of the world are numberless and full of mystery. But, if they honestly realized all this, it would



strike them as something very different from a luxury. And people who talk of the pleasures of memory, and the delights of renewing associations with the past, are often just as far from a real appreciation of what they are discoursing about.

Sufficient notice has not been taken of the mischief which is wrought in the world by the fear of the pain which the rude severance of associations is wont to inflict; in other words, of the harm which men receive from suffering old associations to gain too tight a hold upon them. In a hundred ways, alike in thought and in conduct, the force of association restrains and paralyses. Courage to obey the dictates of truth or prudence, when the memory of former friends or beliefs or habits interposes, is one of the rarest virtues. If it is true that respect for some past is constantly found to be strong enough to keep people back from decline and retrogression, is it any less true that a mistaken tenderness for this same past as often keeps back even the better spirits from the vigorous advance which they would otherwise have made? Nobody could pretend that such an influence is anything but natural. The undeniable fact that it is natural makes it all the more dangerous. As much civilization is due to the steady repression of nature as to its development. Ferocity is very natural, but it is no virtue for all that. A reve-

rence for old associations is nearly always a sign of an affectionate and loveable disposition. It is not so quite always, because men who are harsh in the present, and irritable to persons before them, are often ready to think of past events, and of those who figured in them, with a vehement sentimental kindness. A sentimental man of this sort will glow with warm soft feeling as he thinks of the fine and sympathetic behaviour of his wife in their young days, and within half an hour, straightway forgetting all this, he may rate her savagely for some slight or even imaginary neglect at the passing moment. But if a keen feeling about old associations were a more trustworthy sign than it is of a kindly and amiable temper, that would be no proof that a systematic concession to such feeling is much of a merit. Just as amiability itself may run to seed in a criminal weakness, so the particular kind of amiability which consists in a sedulous regard for old associations, as for things sacred, very frequently leads to maudlin indecision or wrongheadedness. Just as it is often wrong not to be angry, so it is often wrong not to throw old associations to the winds. The author of the 'Idyls of the King' has furnished a delicately worded illustration of a position of this sort, where to yield to the impulses of tender reminiscence would be a fatal sacrifice of dignity and self-respect:—

"I hold that man the worst of public foes  
Who for his own or for his children's sake,  
To save his name from scandal, lets his wife  
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house."

Of course reminiscence is not the only motive in the minds of men who take back dishonoured wives. Dislike to exposure, habit, the peace and fair name of their children, with a score of other considerations, may counsel such a step; only with persons of a sentimental leaning the recollection of old days is not the slightest of these considerations.

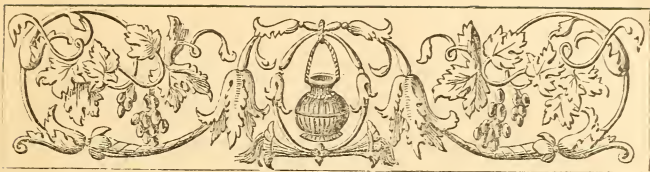
There are other connections, not recognised as binding by the law, which in course of years become in a manner binding on some men, whose "honour rooted in dishonour stands," from a humane unwillingness to tear up old associations. They cannot endure to think of cutting adrift anybody to whom time has attached them. As has been well said of such connections, "Unless you are utterly heartless and worthless, you will find that the looser tie is not the lighter. A man thinks that he has hung a trinket round his neck, and behold, it is a millstone." It may be worth noticing that here, as in all other dilemmas in which mortals find themselves, a man does well to be very sure of himself before he takes any step which irretrievably cuts him off from his own past history. It is a frightful thing, after a man has

built a high wall between himself and the past, for him to find the spectre of the past glaring implacably at him over the top of the futile defence. When we have become alienated from people whom we once loved, it is not the scattering of a little dust which will suffice to appease the restless shades of old associations. Perhaps it is lucky for the majority of mankind that they are little sensible of these pains, though it is possible that, if they were more alive to them, the world would present fewer of those harsh and bitter contrasts which seem to the sentimental moralist to compose the sum of human life.

A robust nature throws off a too morbid tenderness for reminiscence, because it is able to see through the fallacy which very commonly underlies the habit of excessive affection for everybody with whom we have at any time been intimate. One often hears a sort of solemn whimpering over what, in such a case, is wrongly called the irony of life. "What a world this must be," says one, "when here is a man dragging into public court, under circumstances of the deepest ignominy, a woman whom only a few years ago he loved passionately, and swore and meant to love and cherish till death should them part." And, in any case, the sight is mournful enough. Only it is to be remembered that in reality the man is not dragging into court the woman whom he thought he meant

to love and cherish, but, supposing her to be guilty, the mere counterfeit and simulacrum of that woman. It is the same with all forms of unworthy friendship. The lad with whom you used to play, who was your closest friend at college, is in reality not the same person as the mean knave who abuses your friendship in order to play you a scurvy trick. His nature and his bodily presence may have preserved their identity all the while, but, as far as you are concerned, there are in truth two people. There is the old friend, and there is the new-born knave. The new-comer is no friend, and never was. You may justly and painfully lament that the old friend is dead, but that is no reason why old associations should be allowed to cluster round the new and degenerate nature, to the exclusion of a just recognition of the fact that it is new and degenerate. It would be very shallow to deny that all estrangements, all ruptures with a sweet and pleasant past, have a deeply pathetic side. That, unhappily, is likely to escape no one. This other side is less familiar, and it may contain a certain grain of comfort.





### III.

#### BREAKDOWNS.



OME contemporary and friend said of Charles Fox, "He has three passions—women, play, and politics; yet he never formed a creditable connection with a woman in his life; he has squandered all his means at the gaming-table; and, with the exception of eleven months, he has invariably been in Opposition." Unaccountable breakdowns of this kind are among the gravest puzzles of men who look out philosophically upon society, and like to reflect upon the intricacies and contradictions of character. The world is full of people who, either consciously or without knowing it, have failed; that is, have fallen a vast way short of the point to which their qualities and their circumstances alike seemed certain to raise them, without the exertion of a single bit of superhuman or unrea-



sonable virtue. In many, perhaps most, cases, the cause of the failure lies unmistakeably on the surface. Very often some habit, strong enough and noxious enough to destroy all the qualities which tend to success, has been formed in years before the man could see either that he possessed these qualities, or that the habit which he was allowing to get the mastery over him was fatal to them. And people who are concerned to vindicate the ways of God to man on the small fragments of principles by which they usually vindicate the ways of man to his neighbour, confess that there appears something inscrutably harsh in the ease with which a lad or a girl in their teens can, by one slip, blight their whole future.

Besides the cases where the best parts of a man are neutralized by a bad habit of his own, a good many breakdowns may be accounted for by the bad habits of other persons with whom the fallen man has the unhappiness to be connected. Then there is a whole stock of habits which, though scarcely visible in themselves, are not less pestilent in their consequences than drunkenness or incontinence or systematic idleness. No man can know himself who is not conscious of little subtleties of temper, strange perversities of mood, that he perceives but cannot analyse, and queer creatures of the mind that at critical moments rise out of the dark places of sentiment and turn him



to the right hand or the left away from the control of his ordinary reason. The rest of us who are watching him, and who think that we have long since found out all the springs of his conduct, are amazed to find him taking the wrong turning with an invincible assurance, and only smiling complacently, as one who knows better than his neighbours, when he is warned of the abyss which awaits him at the end of his wrong turning. It is a bitter moment when one first finds out that a friend whom the gods will to overthrow has been seized with the infatuation which goes before ruin. Poor Charles Lamb, whenever his unhappy sister showed signs of the approach of one of her mental attacks, used to walk along with her to the asylum, both of them often in tears. A man may feel not less wretched when he sees somebody whom he has loved walking along beyond the reach of help, through sheer wrongheadedness, over the verge of the hell of failure.

But not seldom we are mistaken about a man having failed. The fault was our own in expecting too much. And these expectations are, in nine cases out of ten, the effect of supposing that what anybody has a passion for, that he has all the capacity for attaining. At the risk of seeming to strain after a paradox, it would be nearer the truth so say that, in nine cases out of ten, this view represents the very opposite of what is really the

case. With men of ardent impetuous temper, like Fox for example, failure is the most effective agent for heightening and intensifying the dominant passion. They want excitement, and a prolonged run of bad luck is one of the most exciting things in the world. Moreover, by a law of mind with which people are only too familiar, men are notoriously most eager for what they have not got, and to a certain extent are not likely to get. Besides this, there is all the difference between a strong passion and a strong reasonable will. Passion overlooks means in its headlong anxiety for ends. Hence the weakness of those who occupy themselves too much with thinking how many thoroughly desirable things there are in the world. Clutching at all, they get a solid handful of none. Men with the best aims constantly break down because they cannot bring their great minds so low as details and items and little detached bits of labour and forethought. If they were to devote to detail a tithe of the mental energy which consumes itself in fruitless pondering upon the extreme desirableness of the desirable things, they would be much more than ten times nearer the attainment of their wishes.

It is a constant puzzle to many persons to ascertain what this or that acquaintance does with all his money. They know his income, they know his general mode and style of life, and they know

that he has not saved a sixpence. As is sometimes said of an unhealthy person's food, his money seems to do him no good. The most common and the truest answer to this question, why somebody who makes a good deal of money and lives in a moderate way and yet puts nothing by, is that he fritters or muddles his money away. It is not gross extravagance, but carelessness and shiftlessness, which keeps him floundering in the evil waters of neediness. Precisely the same explanation serves for the fact of so many apparently capable men and women never making any way in life. Buoying themselves up with resolves for the future, they allow the current of present circumstance to carry them drifting down wherever it lists. So the future never comes, and the resolves never bear fruit of fulfilment.

In spite of all that misanthropists think and say about the grudging malignity of the world, there is something astounding in the credit to be got from mere resolutions. Unless we have some reason for especial scrutiny, we are apt to be content, in our neighbours, with an inconvertible currency of fine plans and high-sounding designs. A man's promise to perform passes, in many respects, with ordinary happy-go-lucky folk, for as much as in money matters the Bank of England's promise to pay. And with the same kind of people there is a very narrow limitation

to the sense of the word failure. They require strong evidence and a tremendous depth of ignoble ruin before they will stigmatize a man's career as a failure, a mistake, or a breakdown. There is a certain commonplace standard, easy to satisfy, beyond which nobody expects us to go.

To make a certain income and to have a certain amount saved up are the first duties which the world prescribes to the aspirant after success. No man, it is generally considered, who makes a good income, can be said to have broken down in life. The money test is the first that is applied. And as this is one which can be most easily understood and most widely grasped, it is unreasonable to declaim too much against its use. A large proportion of the people around him can understand with accuracy nothing else about the poet or the philosopher except that he makes such and such sums by his songs or his ideas. It is a great pity that so many persons should be unable to rise to a higher level than this; but, after all, this level is fertile in very serviceable though humble virtues of its own, and there are levels lower still where they have not even reached anything so high as a conviction about the merits of solvency. Still there are defects about the money test. A man may have failed in spite of earning a good income, just as he may have greatly succeeded though his income may have always stood at a too modest

figure. We do not mean that silly picturesque platitude that the peasant in his straw-thatched hovel may be happier than the mighty monarch clad in purple and dwelling in marble halls. This is mere nonsense, because the monarch is a great deal more likely to get happiness in spite, or perhaps by reason, of his responsibilities, than the peasant with his mechanical drudgery, dull brain, and slow half-brutish sensibilities. Nobody, except in a fit of spleen, pretends to believe that a peasant is particularly happy. The man is happiest who gets most out of himself on every side of his character; and if he is hard pinched on his back and in his belly, he gets nothing out of himself on any side, except possibly a measure of animal fortitude. But without endorsing this Tupperry folly about monarchs and peasants, we may easily see that, notwithstanding the good income which satisfies the world at large that he has achieved success, the man himself may be perfectly alive to the fact that he has in reality utterly broken down, and has sold his better self for a mess of pottage. In a fiercely money-getting age there is much more of this remorse than the profane vulgar suppose, or, indeed, are capable of supposing.

Popular applause is another stumbling-block which has tripped up men who, but for that, might have won a success to be valued in their hearts,



instead of one which they have to use hard persuasion to make themselves value. An author who sells twenty editions of a worthless book only made to catch the groundlings, or a painter who makes a fortune out of silly pictures which he knows to be silly, or a parson who draws huge congregations by sermons that are not altogether insincere and yet are not sincere—each of them no doubt, in elated moods, thinks he has not done so ill in the world, but then at bottom he knows that he has done exceedingly ill for himself. Every little stroke of such success is so much added to the weight of regret in the unelated moments. Perhaps in most cases it is the intolerableness of this weight which drives a man who was originally a very small impostor into being eventually a very large and brazen impostor. He is like a drunkard who flies to the bottle to drown the sense of his own ignominy. He requires a dram of the vulgar praise that has undone him, in order to make him forget how ignobly he has sold himself. So he gets deeper and deeper into the slough of claptrap in his books or his paintings or his sermons, or in whatever shape it is that he presents the world with the adulterated lees of his mind.

Breakdowns in life, whether of that gross and palpable sort which all the world can behold, or such as are only visible in the light of the man's

own conscience, are all the result of some kind of moral worthlessness. Neither untoward circumstances nor the evil behaviour of others can effect the fall of a man with a firmly based character. They may make him halt in his journey, and stumble and grow weary, and this is bad enough. But there is no ruin in it. On the contrary, until years have stolen away his sap and vigour, the feeling of having got well over a nasty place, though the reminiscence is too painful to allow him to congratulate himself, still inspires him with a sober confidence and a trustworthy self-respect which supports and encourages him in every new venture.

People break down because they do not take pains with their character, as they would with their bodies if they were going to fight or to run a race. They seldom keep themselves in moral training. The consequence is that the first blow from the enemy Circumstance, or the first severe spurt in the course, leaves them sprawling and breathless. The man in fine moral condition gets tremendous knocks and bruises like his neighbours, but he is soon healed. Nobody, one may suppose, is in perfect condition, but there is a too plain difference between those who take habitual pains to preserve a healthy balance of character, and those who fritter away their lives in playing shilly-shally with themselves, acting from one set of motives one day and from another set the next, first bringing the



body under, and then giving way to every appetite, to-day ascetics, and Sybarites to-morrow. The old Roman proverb ran that *nullum numen abest si sit prudentia*, and it is the absence of the virtue to which they gave the name of prudence that we may best express by worthlessness. Lack of foresight and vigilance, of concentration and self-control, of ability to look for remote ends and to discern sure means, implies that limpness and flaccidity of character which almost ensures a crash at the first obstacle that presents itself. And even if there be no crash, there is at best only a feeble hobbling along the path, instead of a vigorous and stalwart stride.





#### IV.

#### SMALL HYPOCRISIES.

**T**HE hollowness of a great deal of our social intercourse is a commonplace which makes ardent young men very angry and eloquent and amusing, and crude-minded older men very sour and shrewish. The one declaim and the other sneer because people who ask you to dinner, and are very happy to have you at their dancing-parties, decline to lend you money or to let you marry their daughters. The conduct of society is constantly being brought back to the first principles, not of society, but of a state of nature. The inconsistency is plain. The grumblers like balls and rural fêtes, but they demand a community of goods, and think they have a right to the hand of any woman they may covet, such as could only exist in the nomadic, or even the fishing and hunting, stage of

the progress of the race. They do not see that if asking a man to dinner implies an invitation to him to help himself to as much money as he requires, or to take whichever of the daughters of the house is most to his fancy, then, as soon as this is discovered, the man will not be asked to dinner—that is all. If we are to revert to the Bedouin and Oriental principle, that it is atrociously inhospitable to refuse a guest any favour that he may ask, we shall all grow very careful not to entertain any but married men with more money than they know what to do with. The cramping effects which such a revolution would produce upon hospitality may be very readily imagined. As it is, those who insist that every friend is an impostor who does not wear his heart and his purse and his daughter's heart and purse upon his sleeve, are themselves the worst impostors of all. They pretend to like a man for the pleasure which his society and that of his friends can give, while all the time they are only thinking, not how they can repay him for this, but how many more material advantages they can extract from his good feeling or his weakness. It seems very pointed and damning to say that the lady who has shaken hands with him in her drawing-room with so much cordiality and enthusiasm would be just as cheerful if she heard the next day that he had become bankrupt. Why should she not be? Surely one may

be pleased to see an agreeable man, without binding our heartstrings round him, or staking our peace of mind upon his solvency. Anybody can get a cheap reputation as a philosopher by taking up the line that such a doctrine as this is the glorification of selfishness. The insincerity of the world is one of those fine windy themes which are capable of a very exalted and pleasing treatment. They make a weak man or a weak woman feel ever so much better and holier. Not that such edification has the smallest effect upon their conduct. They would rather esteem it an irreverence to bring the windy high-falutin' principles down from their sacred places into common use. It is a vast comfort to know that they look with proper contempt upon the hypocrisies of society, that is, of their next-door neighbour. The comfort, one supposes, is much the same as that which warms the bosom of the pagan as he thwacks the little wooden god that he adores. The hugest blows that can be heaped upon the back of an abstraction like society do no harm to the abstraction, and they relieve, to a delightful extent, the feelings of the man who raises his right arm to the task.

It is much more profitable to observe the prevalence and the consequences of the small hypocrisies of the individual than to bewail the vague hypocrisy of society as a whole. There may be a great deal of use in reflecting on the harm which a man may do

himself by the practice of petty deceits upon his neighbours. There cannot much good come of believing that all mankind are in a friendly conspiracy to cheat one another; but the plot of a man to pass himself off for something which he is not, and which he has excellent reasons for knowing himself not to be, is a piece of conduct that may be looked at soberly and practically. We can see what this means. But when people say that society is selfish and insincere, we scarcely have a much more accurate idea of what they specifically mean than if they said that a locomotive was selfish.

A whole parcel of small social hypocrisies is commonly labelled with the simple name of affectation. The laudable kinds of insincerity may be mostly summed up in the significantly un-English name of complaisance. In ordinary speech, complaisance, even in its worst sense, seldom means more than an unselfish hypocrisy. It is the attempt to be sympathetic with other people, not for any sinister aim in the background, but merely because the man likes to feel things going smoothly, and with as little grittiness as possible. Obviously this (on the whole) useful and creditable habit may become ignoble. The man who is universally complaisant, and has lost the faculty of saying other than smooth words, very soon finds that the world has taken the measure of his weakness, although perhaps he may deliberately prefer that people

should think little of him than that they should put him to the trouble of arguing and disagreeing and quarrelling with them. The very backbone of affectation, on the other hand, is an aggressive egotism. Nobody is affected who does not want to attract admiration to himself, or, if not admiration, at least that amount of attention which may be equally flattering and equally pleasant to a vain man. Whether he professes virtues or vices which he has not got, his aim is equally to make the bystander or the listener think about him. He will submit to anything except being thought like other people, or, worse still, not being thought of at all. Not confident that the qualities which he has are enough to win for him this consideration, he puts on the air of all sorts of other qualities which he has not got, and which very often nobody would value him for if he really had them. Dunning, the lawyer, used to spend hours before the mirror posing and practising airs which might persuade the crowd of impatient attorneys waiting for him that his ugly face and figure were very handsome and graceful. Nobody cared a straw whether he was handsome or ugly. There is no limit to the absurdity of the guises which vanity will make a man ready to put on.

Oddly enough, foibles and faults and weaknesses are the most favourite devices of affected persons. They will pretend to be in bad health, when in



truth they are perfectly well. They will adopt a silly lisp, or they will mouth their words, when it would be much more convenient to them to speak like everybody else. They resort to tricks of gait and tricks of gesture, when everybody would be much better pleased, and would think far more kindly of them, if they walked and comported themselves without tricks, and even though the tricks are a downright trouble to them. The worst of all is that the men and women who are most guilty of these follies are constantly found to be just those who might most safely trust to their real character for esteem and admiration. The affectation of clever people has become a proverb. A great poet or a great lawyer may be found to divide the palm of affectation with the emptiest little miss in the room. The pleasure which really able persons derive from passing themselves off as great fools must be one of the most curious in the whole repertory of human joys. That a wise man should now and again deliberately play the part of a fool is not unreasonable. For instance, for convicting a pragmatistical blockhead, and showing the bystanders how great a blockhead he is, there is nothing more effective than the Socratic method of feigning ignorance and a desire to be persuaded. But this may soon be carried too far, and in any case is easily distinguishable from the assumption of imbecility for the purpose of making people talk and wonder about you.



It sometimes happens that what plain folk mistake for an absurd and offensive affectation is the genuine air and manner of *distinction*. Clowns look on the simplest points of good breeding as despicable fopperies. And those who are not clowns are often too intolerant of what look like insincere mannerisms, but which may be really the natural outcome of a strongly marked individuality. Provided it be not simply rude and ill-timed and selfish and arrogant, such distinction gives a fresh and vivid tone to the otherwise monotonous and too tame level of ordinary intercourse. But for one case where it is spontaneous and natural, in twenty cases it is the artificial product of a restless self-consciousness. Half of all the small hypocrisies of all kinds are the fruit of the same morbid distrust of ourselves. The man who is always wondering about himself, what sort of qualities he has, and what is thought of him, is sure to feel the necessity of posing, and clothing himself in purple patches which may catch the eye of the beholder. Even a plain woman, if she feels that somebody is looking at her, is apt to turn a little theatrical. It is the same with more impressive forms of self-consciousness. Nobody with his mind fixed wholly and habitually upon himself and upon the view which others will take of him can help playing a part. Self-consciousness instantly makes a man feel that he is in front of

the footlights, with paint on his face, and clad in a costume which is not that of his everyday life.

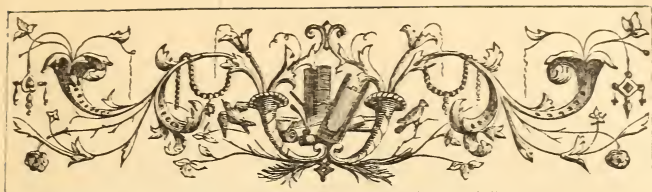
It would be a palpable overstraining of the truth to say that hypocrisy, the foible, is as bad as hypocrisy, the vice. Affectation, for example, is not as bad as cant, because cant is affectation in matters in which sincerity and truth are everything. To pretend to agree and to sympathize with people somewhat more than is really the case, just for the sake of general peace and quietness, is of course not so bad as a gross assentation for the sake of substantial personal gain. A certain willingness to hear opinions patiently and silently, in spite of a strong itch to controvert them, is absolutely necessary to keep the world from being a sheer bear-garden. If this reticence is mistaken for assent and sympathy, the silent person is not wholly responsible for the blunder. And it is impossible to draw an exact line beyond which this implied complaisance acquires a colour of baseness. A great deal depends on the subject, and everything else depends on the time and the place and the person. Some poor creatures are born for assentation. Disinterested flattery is the attitude which they naturally assume towards nearly everybody with whom they are brought into contact. Of the hypocrisies of these miserable souls nothing need be said, except that one may pretty safely conclude that a cringer of this stamp has always got some one or

two unlucky and still smaller persons in the background whom a mysterious Providence has placed in his hands to endure bullying and tyranny from him.

To see the real smallness of insincerity in trifles, of insincere manners, of insincere complaisance, and all the other forms of social hypocrisy, one has only to put by the side of people who yield to such weaknesses those others whom a natural simplicity, straightforwardness, and at the same time sweetness of character, keep from swerving. They need no precepts about preserving the *volto sciolto* along with the *pensieri stretti*—the ingenuous front with the reserved mind. An apparently inborn straightness of judgment seems to conduct them to the nicest, though an involuntary, knowledge of the point whence things unworthy have their beginning. They do not make enemies or disturb society. Yet they neither feign to be what they are not, nor dissemble what they are. Small hypocrisies never occur to them as available means to any end whatever. The cleverness of the most skilful social diplomat has a wonderfully gas-light tawdry look when confronted with this vigorous native simplicity, which is independent without being impudent or boorish, and fascinating without unworthy compliance. For all forms of affectation and pretence show a misconception of the relative size of things that are worth having. As if self-

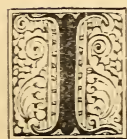
respect, and the invigorating consciousness of sincerity and singlemindedness, were cheaply sacrificed for the sake of being thought something that one is not by the world!—that is, by a number of people who do not much care whether one is that or anything else.





V.

THE LEOPARD AND HIS SPOTS.



IT is suprising to find how little most people understand what is really involved in a man's *character*, and how imperfectly they appreciate the fact that it must always be by far the most important thing about him. The proof of this is the tenacity with which we see them persisting, in the face of all experience, in the expectation of a given line of conduct from a person whose whole character renders such conduct as sheer an impossibility as it is for a bramble to produce grapes, or for a thistle to bring forth figs. They do not recognize that it is character which makes the difference between one kind of man and another, or that the differences thus established are as generic as those between a peony and a violet, between an ass and a horse, between a block of granite and a reach of



shifting sand. If all this were realized as it deserves to be, some of the kindest and best persons in the world would be saved from the pains of the most bitter disappointment that can be felt ; and, more than this, they would understand better how to set to work to procure at least an approximation to the fulfilment of their hopes. That is to say, in the first place, they would not demand more from a certain character than it is capable of giving ; and, in the second place, having gauged its capacity, they would waste no time in fruitless efforts to drag it beyond this, but would make all their energies tell, by confining them within the limits where only they could be effective. To insist upon getting from off a certain soil a richer kind of crop than it can support, is the surest way both to fail in this, and to lose the humbler crop which might have been got.

There is much that is excusable in the motives which prompt an indulgence in a delusive shutting of the eyes to what character means. It is always more or less distasteful to an ardent mind to find itself in presence of insurmountable obstacles to the accomplishment of its desires ; and it may safely be asserted that no obstacles are so hopeless as those which the character of a grown-up person opposes. There is, at first sight, something downright preposterous and incredible in the notion that anybody can be absolutely and finally incapacitated for dis-



cerning his or her own good, or, if not for seeing it, still for practically pursuing it. It seems as if, in a well ordered world, everybody should be able to ascend at least whatever moral heights are within his view. Yet we see people every day who could no more endure the hardships and difficulties involved in the practice of this or that virtue than Sir John Falstaff could have got to the top of the Matterhorn. After a certain time, and in some cases from the very beginning, there are feats which it is out of the question to perform. Nearly any boy of seven or eight years of age might be taken and made into a perfect gymnast, for whom no exploit of skill that ever has been performed would be too difficult to repeat. But a man of five-and-thirty, accustomed to live freely and not too regularly, could never be made, by any amount of training and industry and self-denial, agile enough to wheel a barrow along a rope ever so many score feet above the ground. Metaphors are always a little dangerous, but this seems a fair illustration of the moral impossibilities which exist in the case of a settled character. The excuse for ignoring or resolutely denying these moral impossibilities is that, now and then, somebody whom all his friends have considered given up to a reprobate mind, turns over a new leaf, and becomes a very prodigy of virtue. In the same way, less happily, a man or woman up to a certain point in

life does all that piety and social duty demand, and then suddenly falls away into shameful courses. Cases of this sort, however, do not in any way upset the general law that a man can only act as his character allows or compels him. The only true conclusion to be drawn from sudden repentances and sudden backslidings is that we should be slow in assuring ourselves that we have fathomed all the depths, and acquainted ourselves with all the hidden recesses of anybody's character.

It may be asked, can we ever be sure, after any amount of experience on this side of the grave, that we have got this exhaustive knowledge of the character of a single human being? Do we know any one person who does not now and again surprise us by some caprice, some inconsistency, something which, the moment before seeing it, we should have declared utterly impossible, and not to be thought of? It is true that human nature seems to love freaks and paradoxes. And nobody with much experience of these vagaries would be rash enough to predict with dogmatic confidence how his most intimate friend would act in the midst of a certain set of outward conditions. We may at any moment find that in an unexplored corner of his mind lie a whole brood of desires and scruples and ideas, which nobody, perhaps not even the man himself, had ever suspected. But

then the point that we are pressing is that they were there before, and that it was not the outward conditions which begot them. Circumstances only act as a magnifying instrument. They show qualities, and in the past they have helped to generate them; but the man's conduct in any particular case is the fruit and outcome of motives which were prepared beforehand. When Coleridge says that it is the man who makes the motive, and not the motive the man, this is what he means. If you knew the man thoroughly, you would also know thoroughly to which of two conflicting motives in a crisis he will be sure to yield. It is his character which gives to the victorious motive the preponderating weight, and only in a secondary and reflex way that the motive operates on his character. For instance, suppose you see a friend conceiving the project of marrying, when you know that he is spoiling his prospects by such a step. You make the consequences of his design clear to him, and he still perseveres. Why? Because he is of an improvident and inconsiderate character. Because the habit of postponing the future to the present, of purchasing a small gratification now at the sacrifice of a greater and more enduring good to come, has got such mastery over him that he is as completely disabled from balancing motives as he would be from walking if he had both his legs paralysed. He has lost the power of free

choice whither he will go, and is like a locomotive forced to run in whatever direction his second nature chooses to set the points. True, it was his own fault that he selected a pointsman who always turned him on to wrong lines, leading to the various halting-places that skirt the road to ruin.

And this brings us to the gist of the doctrine. People foolishly say that, by representing second nature as so mighty and irresistible, one is preaching a kind of fatalism, and teaching men to give up the battle with evil habits. But surely a more probable effect of pointing out how inexorably a man's character rules over him, will be that greater wariness and diligence will be exercised in the formation of so omnipotent an agency. If he knows that the habits which he tolerates or encourages in himself will eventually make it a matter of infinite difficulty, or even of plain impossibility, to act otherwise than as they permit, then he is all the more likely to exercise a cautious judgment in going under the yoke. Teach him that he can dethrone his rulers at a moment's notice, and he becomes comparatively indifferent to the real beneficence or hurtfulness of their sway.

Perhaps, however, it may seem that, after all, the practical tendency of this theory, that the fruit is only such as it is the nature of the tree to bear, is to make everybody who has got a weak character yield to despair, or rather yield without

resistance to the demands of the formidable tyrant whom they have placed over themselves. Even if this were so, it would be no reason why we should not exert ourselves to deliver others from some part at least of the evil which besets them. The discovery that a cob-nut tree is not a vine is no reason why we should not dung and dig about the cob-nut. A man finds, for example, that his wife, whom he took for a very high-souled sympathetic woman, proves on nearer acquaintance to have got a confirmed habit of looking at things in a narrow, fractious, half-hearted way. If he does not grasp the fact that people cannot climb higher than their own nature, he will probably have the rest of his days made miserable by injudicious and overstrained efforts to raise the character of his wife to an impossible altitude. But if he be a wise man, he knows that he can only make the best of what is; and the conviction that he is mated to a creature whom he cannot radically alter, and yet whom he has no legal excuse for putting away, will not make him kick against the pricks. On the contrary, aware that the temper which vexes and harasses him is the result of an evil growth on one side, and is in a manner inevitable, he will both know how in some sort to counterbalance the evil by developing the other side, and, meanwhile, to take what has befallen him as lightly as may be. A recognition



like this of the truth of the case prevents the fretful and wearing anger which leads to such a waste of the equable enjoyment of life.

Besides, a just insight into all that depends upon character is the strongest incitement to caution, either in taking a wife or in forming any other relation with one's fellows. People often fancy that they have got the secret of a character when they have only caught a single superficial mood. They will not be persuaded that one or two moods, one or two outbursts of a particular humour, are far from exhausting the depths of anybody's nature. Or else, on the other hand, the experience of the one or two moods is thrown away upon them. When men and women fall in love with one another, they nearly always exhibit this infatuated blindness to what disinterested observers can see plainly enough. Who has not known a man confess that the lady of his love has such and such faults, and yet persist that underneath there lies a fine rich nature, which only requires a little culture, a little removal from unfortunate home influences, and so on? Everybody but himself may be able to see that the given faults are incompatible with any underlying fineness or richness. He himself makes the discovery when it is too late. One has seen even shrewd and sensible men marry women with no more stability or individuality of character than one of the india-rubber faces, which school-



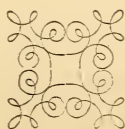
boys amuse themselves by twisting into any shape they choose, yet with the persuasion all the time that marriage would, in some mysterious way, develop this lacking force.

And here is another of the commonest delusions in the world. Both with respect to others, and in thinking about themselves, people hope that some change in outward circumstance will accomplish that change of character which, in reality, can only be effected either by their own will, or else which perhaps cannot be effected at all, because they are incapable of willing it strongly enough. A man admits that he is indolent, and that his schemes remain unfulfilled, but goes on hoping that when he gets into his new house, or has got his books removed into a quieter room, then his industry will forthwith know no bounds. Or his life is involved in a general tangle; everything is cloudy and in disorder. Instead of either setting steadily to work to unravel the complications in which he is enmeshed, or else of cutting the knot with a metaphorical sword, he trusts, with patient confidence, that some change of outward surrounding will put everything to rights for him. How many men have fancied that going into orders would instantaneously quench all evil desires, and extirpate all evil habits, and make the practice of virtue and high-mindedness both easy and sure! Yet men do not hope to gather grapes off a bramble by moving it

into a vinery. Did one not see such abundant instances of this mistaken hope, it would appear impossible for men to suppose that a character which has been the growth of a large portion of a life, which has been made what it is by the accumulation of thousands of repeated acts and a mass of daily indulged habits, should be revolutionized and turned into something quite different by a single outward process, such as being married or ordained. There is something essentially pathetic in the tenacity with which weak men and weaker women cling to the hope that an anticipated change of circumstance will bring them a magical accession of moral strength. But the sooner they learn that they are hoping in vain, the more likely they are to betake themselves to more efficacious remedies, provided only they have salt of character and energy enough to be able to profit by the discovery.

Theologians see into the significance of all this when they assert the impossibility of conversion without the special interference of divine grace. It is, perhaps, a reaction from this, as from so many other theological dogmas, which accounts for the unwillingness of moralists to interpret the momentous truth contained in it into the phrases of morals. But still the truth is very well worth attending to, that it is not mere taking thought that will enable a man to add a cubit to his moral,

any more than to his physical stature. He is what he is made by circumstances, by others, and above all by himself. Only a time comes when the process is more or less reversed, and when he is drawn along and governed by the character which, in the first instance, was in part his own creation.





## VI.

### PEOPLE WITH NOTHING IN THEM.

**T**HE tyranny of the clever is admitted by everybody, in his own conscience, to be among the most oppressive of the minor social pests, only it is one of those despotisms which make men afraid even of whispering their dislike. The severity with which the intellectual oligarchs lord it over plain folk crushes any effort at rebellion among the ranks of gentle dulness and well-meaning stupidity. To question their pretensions, to hint that character has other departments besides cleverness, is to expose yourself to the hazard of being meanly thought of, and numbered among poor creatures. With a splendid magnanimity they allow that poor creatures are a necessary, if mysterious, element in the general order and system of things, but still an element to be kept in a stage of profound

depression, befitting their weak capacities and the little they can do for the general weal. Considering that the world is mostly composed of persons who, in the favourite phrase of their intellectual betters, have nothing in them, the only surprising thing is that even the existing level of happiness, low as it is, can by any means be preserved. That things should be able to go on at all, when there are so many fools and so few wise men to guide them, is a fact so astonishing as only to be accounted for by a theory that must raise the fools very highly in every sensible man's esteem. It must be that a person may have nothing in him and yet be magically able to bring forth of his treasures things new and old. Or else it may prove that the quality, which he is charged with having no particle of, is not so entirely the root of every good thing in life as the fortunate oligarchs suppose. As the present is a time when a magical is invariably postponed to a rational explanation, where a rational explanation is to be had, perhaps the more popular theory will be the latter of the two we have named—that a person may have little cleverness and yet have plenty of other desirable things.

Put in this way, the smartest of coxcombs is forced to admit the doctrine. Only, admitting a doctrine in general terms is altogether different from allowing its application in a special case; and

in special cases the coxcombs who rule too powerfully over us make a point of denying that without brains anybody can have any qualities that are worth mentioning. The consequence is that simple men and women are tolerated and patronized and snubbed by those who are beneath them in every respect, except possibly the power of speech and the power of impudence. For, by a grave abuse of the truth that a tree is known by its fruits, it is sometimes argued that silence is a proof of one's having nothing to say. The clever coxcomb will not be persuaded that anybody who can speak may be careful as to the times and seasons of his speaking, or, in spite of his ability to speak, may wish rather to listen or to think. This is just as true as the other opinion created by reaction from the first, that a man who never speaks, but appears to devote all his energies to thinking, must of necessity be thoughtful. Hence a silent man is pretty sure to be well thought of by one half perhaps of those who make it their business to judge their neighbours. One half will stigmatize his silence as dulness, the other will extol it as the sign of a profound meditateness upon the causes of things.

But mistakes as to the outward signs of there being something within a man are less important than the principles on which the nature of this most desirable of internal qualities is commonly estimated. It is the usage to treat dulness and



inability to appreciate great ideas as an unforgivable offence, against which it is impossible to be too severe. Hence the wholesale contempt with which, traditionally and in the mass, a coxcomb is wont to regard women. Women, as a rule, are so badly educated that they do not furnish to the world powerful reasoners, or brilliant discoverers of truth, or profound scholars. Therefore, the conclusion runs, they have nothing in them, for the capacity of moral patience, the instinctive desire to do beneficent works, the diffusiveness of sympathy, all, of course, count for as good as nothing. It is not only the coxcomb who falls into this supreme blunder. It is the tendency of even the ablest men to suppose that there is no side of character of much value but that on which they themselves are strongest. They know how blank and dismally empty their own lives would be, if robbed of the exercises of thinking and reasoning and balancing, and hence they attribute a like blankness and barrenness to every other life in which they do not see the same faculties in constant and vigorous exercise. Just in the same way, anybody who relishes the delights of books is apt to think that the less studious mind must inevitably be wholly without savour. The truth is that, as innate shrewdness and mother wit in one case may compensate for lack of book-learning, so, in the other, gentleness and delicacy and depth

of moral sympathy more than make up for the absence of intellectual acuteness. And even where only the blindest partiality could pretend to discover anything like this exquisite delicacy of perception and width of sympathy, there may still be a fund of kindly graces and honest good-will. Is simple affectionateness of character no recommendation? Is it not a weightier quality and a larger social influence than any amount of second-rate cleverness?

The broad course of public transactions is regulated, or ought to be, almost entirely by considerations that may not spring from, but are at least conformable to, the reasoning side of men. But the life of the family and the individual receives its choicest elements less from the intellectual than the moral side, and, except in rare cases, from the moral side in its least grandiose aspect. Let the coxcomb, or the man who insists on measuring everything by a narrow intellectual standard, and everybody by his intellectual height and grasp, reflect how much is contributed to the stock of happiness by poor kindly old ladies and warm-hearted impulsive men who never reasoned a thing out in their lives, and have not even a notion how things are reasoned out. Even feather-headed sisters and old grey mothers may be worth more to a family than the brilliant son who likes to deplore that they are not clever and learned,

and have so little in them, and are so incapable of taking interest in intellectual topics. The absence of intellectual brilliance is not so much felt in a life where good offices and encouraging, sympathetic words, and graciousness and geniality, can diffuse such a glow of tender light over existence. Men and women who have nothing in them but these excellent qualities are not so very badly off after all. It is the mark of a real highmindedness to be able to tolerate intellectual commonplace when it is accompanied by these minor virtues. A man of ordinary thinness of nature, coated over by means of a more or less learned training, is simply revolted and angry with people who cannot argue and will not enter into all the new-fangled ideas of the hour. No amount of any other qualities will reconcile him to this mental defect. But the salt of character, with those of richer nature or wiser culture, is not thought to dwell only in intellectual power or in intellectual attainments.

It is obviously childish to argue that, because some people who have got no strength or polish from intellectual culture are in every vital respect better and greater than many of those who have got this polish, therefore intellectual culture is not worth taking very much trouble about. Whatever graciousness and simplicity of character anybody has would have broken into still sweeter and more exquisite flower under the enriching influence of

letters and trained thought. And, moreover, life abounds in slight occasions and small affairs which call for the exercise of a certain largeness and openness of nature that is never the product of anything but culture in the better order of minds. There is always a bound to mere graciousness and kindliness. No uncultivated person can be tolerant and reasonable under every circumstance, and to everybody. Prejudice lurks in hidden corners of all minds over which knowledge has not shed its penetrating light, and prejudice is the natural foe of magnanimity.

It is at this point that kind dull people break down even on the grounds of their own virtue. Like all dull people, they are the rightful prey of prejudice, and they are disposed to buoy themselves up in narrow ungracious courses, where a prejudice is concerned, by a justifiable consciousness of their usual gentleness and kind design. Culture would have left them all their natural virtue, and it would have had the merit of giving room for its free and uncontrolled play. There is no certainty and reliance about stupidish persons, however well they may behave in an ordinary way. Their character conceals a hundred sunken rocks. You thought you could be sure of their aid or their sympathy in a certain set of circumstances, and you suddenly find their faces fixed as flint against you. These stony caprices are the kind of

conduct against which culture protects both the individual and those who are thrown into contact with him. Women, for example, are more capricious than men, because they are less cultivated. And, though often possessing a full-blooded sweetness of character which is worth a great deal more than mere intellectual quickness, they are very rarely magnanimous. Magnanimity is not a feminine virtue, nor, in the minor dealings of life, is it a virtue characteristic of anybody of whom it could be said with a shadow of meaning that he had nothing in him.

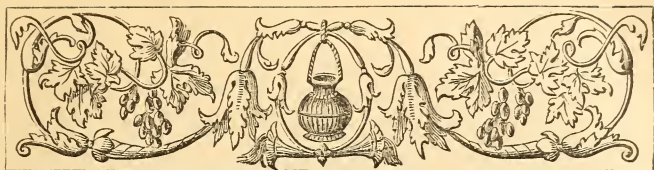
It is plain enough that commonplace people who possess no quality to distinguish them from their neighbours are bores to all but those of their own class and position in the intellectual system. There is no character for whom an intelligent person can feel so little sympathy or even tolerance, if he be of an impatient temper, as one of these truly hapless souls incapable of an impulse, unable to feel, unable to reason, and filled with a perverse and stiff conviction that stereotyped opinions on all subjects are the only opinions worth having. Where the commonplace character is passive, it is more than sufficiently hard to endure. But when it assumes aggressive forms, and attempts the contumelious repression of what is not commonplace, the limits of endurance are passed. It is monstrous that people who have really nothing in



them except a set of opinions and feelings which they have, so to say, just picked up in the streets without knowing why or wherefore, should try to represent their own flavourless insipid natures as the best type and colour of character. Still, it is worth noticing that the more common meaning of the accusation against a woman, for example, that she has nothing in her, is that she is not brilliantly clever. The thousand excellences which do not come under the head of cleverness are reckoned at less than a pin's fee, when it would be nearer the truth to say that she has everything in her.







## VII.

### PLAIN-DEALING.

**E**VERYBODY knows something of the qualities of the great class of Plain-dealers. Most of us are personally acquainted with one or two folk who pride themselves upon a singular frankness of speech, and a disinterested contempt for reserve and discretion. It cannot be said that the qualities of these very remarkable people are of a kind to reconcile us to their fundamental principle. In the first place, a generous profusion of advice to others is mostly accompanied by a ready resentment of any advice offered to themselves, and this offends one's sense of justice. We feel that, if the plain-dealer insists on warning his friend against this or that defect, he should in turn bear patiently, or even embrace gladly, all just monitions respecting his own weaknesses. Again, those who

deal faithfully with their neighbours, and refuse to be misled by the considerations of a feeble complaisance into shutting their eyes to other people's foibles and faults, have a knack of being incurably blind to their virtues. They insist upon the importance of recognising facts; but, unfortunately, under the name of facts, they only include the follies and vices, the selfishness and the meannesses, of their acquaintance, their false steps and their consequent troubles. With the keenest vision for a flaw, they have no eye for a perfection. This is as great an injustice as its opposite. If we are to be warned against any given tendency to evil, we ought to be encouraged in any contrary tendency to good. If harsh criticism possesses, as is supposed, some influence which makes its objects better, why should not generous eulogy in proper circumstances sustain its objects at a certain pitch of goodness?

But a plain-dealer of the right stamp, while convinced of the inestimable worth of what he calls a word in season, is never lucky enough to find an occasion when a word of praise or encouragement would be seasonable. And he is apt to entertain very odd notions, even with reference to what makes the season when a word might be useful. If a man's inability to control his impulses leads him into straits and shallows, the moment commonly chosen by the plain-dealer for his

faithful exhortations is that at which the miserable victim has just discovered the peril into which his bad pilotage has brought him, and is straining every nerve to get back into smooth water again. Perhaps an impartial third person may suggest that probably it is better to help the wretch out of his trouble, or at least to leave him in peace to help himself out, and then, if necessary, he can be duly lectured afterwards. The good Samaritan who poured oil upon the man's wounds was better than the Levite who passed indifferently by on the other side; but the Levite is better than one who, instead of oil, should pour in vinegar and brine. This, however, is entirely repugnant to the plain-dealer's views. He declares that there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot. If you point out his faults to a man precisely when he is suffering from them most severely, he is the better able to realize your meaning, and to admit the justice of your friendly reproaches. They then have a pointedness, a beautiful nicety of application, an impressive weightiness, which it is impossible to shirk. All this sounds very cogent, but a pretty obvious blunder underlies it—the blunder, namely, of supposing that lecturings and exhortations can somehow teach a lesson which cannot be taught effectively by actual suffering and the visible turns of circumstance. As if a man who would not be convinced of his weakness by the

failures and vexations which it has brought upon him would at once yield to the persuasions of a plain-dealing friend, and as if what events could not do might be brought about by talk. This is so dead in the face of all ordinary tendencies of human nature, that there must be some rather strong feeling which supports the plain-dealers of the world in their unseasonable courses.

In fact, there are at least two sentiments at work, quite apart from the mere impertinence and conceit which prompt to intrusive speech and unasked counsel in another person's affairs. First, it is extremely disagreeable and vexatious to admit that there are people given up to a sort of reprobate mind. It seems outrageous that anybody should be smitten with a desperate blindness and incapacity of managing his life aright. The modern temper forbids us to bow to fate or fortune. We would fain conceal from ourselves the rather humiliating truth that practically there is a force in the disposition of a man, and in the circumstances that surround him, which comes to much the same thing for his friends and neighbours, if not for himself, as if he were fast bound by an iron destiny. The plain-dealer thinks still that the friends should not spare their remonstrance, and he asks you whether, if you see a man walking heedlessly to the edge of a precipice, you are not to pluck him back. But talk about striking iron

while it is hot, or plucking people from the edges of precipices, clouds the real matter, as metaphors are wont to do. What looks like falling sheer over into ruin and degradation is more probably a gradual and inevitably subsiding down to the level for which all the man's temper and habits and surroundings, from his youth upwards, have been combining to fit him. To urge upon him the imminence of degradation or misfortune is a task of dismal supererogation in the case of one who has been bringing himself, step by step, to look upon misfortune as something beyond control, and to think of degradation as a mere phrase, invented by the lucky to bring out more fully their own superiority.

Of course, there are occasional misdemeanours which are almost of the nature of accidents; but where one observes systematic misconduct or folly, it is fair to conclude that it springs from fundamental principles, or else lack of principles; and in either case a word in season is little more potent than the mop contending against the Atlantic. The philosophy of the homely saying, that as such a one has made his own bed he must be content to lie in it, is a good deal wider and deeper than it is always pleasant to think. It is difficult to admit that character and conduct and their consequences are all inextricably linked together; that they present an inexorable front



against which the good wishes of others are absolutely powerless ; and that what a man sows that shall he surely reap also. The plain-dealers are not the only class who kick against the pricks.

But besides refusing to realize that there is something which, for all but the man himself, stands in the place of fate, they sustain themselves in their inopportune counsellings by the argument that the substance of them is true. Such and such a thing, they say, *is* so, and therefore it behoves us to force it on the attention of him whom it concerns. Perhaps there is no doctrine in the world which has produced, or at least has been used to countenance, so much mischievous folly and impertinence as this. The profoundly wise saying that all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient, is somehow distorted into the vicious principle that nothing which is lawful is not also expedient. In the wide field of history, of politics, of administration, of religious belief, the consequences of such a misconception have been abundantly disastrous. And in the less elevated region of private and social life the blunder is just as injurious. A man has made an undoubted fool of himself ; therefore you have a right to let him know that you think so. Therefore, as on this theory there is no distinction between a right and a duty, you are bound to exercise your right. The conscience must be relieved. Every



man must hold himself in readiness at any moment to mount the pulpit and discourse to his erring neighbour; for truth may be unpalatable, but it can never be unwholesome. Here, again, the plain-dealer entrenches himself behind a fallacious metaphor. And besides, if there be any foundation for a comparison between unpleasant truths and doses of medicine, is there to be no judgment in the times and seasons of administering them? Are we to be for ever indiscriminately physicking our friends, just because we happen to have a few spare drugs on hand? The simples which, on general grounds, would seem most suitable are constantly found to disagree in particular cases. And anybody must have had a peculiarly narrow range of experience in life, or else be resolutely deaf to its teaching, who insists that one can only make a man better by demonstrating to him that he is acting like a great fool or a great rascal.

There are a few people in the world, it may be conceded, who relish unpalatable truths. They have a sort of itch for being criticized, provided always that things do not get too earnest, and that the quick is not touched. They really like to have their faults pointed out by their close acquaintance. Young men of a certain stamp are especially willing to undergo such friendly dissection. But this is found pretty generally in connection with a

Mutual Admiration Society. Bits of blame serve to give a piquant flavour to the huge messes of eulogy and compliment which form the staple of the intercourse. A taste for having one's faults delicately and gracefully handled is, after all, only a very subtle or a very morbid form of egotism. The thorough-going egotist would rather have his weaknesses talked about than not be talked about at all. After a prolonged debate upon his merits, a slight digression into the subdued twilight of his faults makes a pleasant change, and it is a mistake to suppose that an ostentatious anxiety to be told of faults involves a corresponding resolution to amend them. People who really value advice, and honestly mean to give it a fair hearing, are chary in seeking what may involve an unpleasant obligation.

It is hard to decide whether insincere complaisance or unseasonable plain-dealing is the more to be objected to. Just as some people insist on giving their opinions whether you want them or not, so there are others who, convinced that you do not honestly care for what they think, nor intend to be guided by what they say, have no further concern than to resort, in every case alike, to hackneyed words and glozing speeches. The man will pursue his own course, they say, in spite of counsel, and therefore one may as well be pleasant as the opposite. The plain-dealer has at all events this ad-

vantage over the unscrupulously complaisant, that his theory sounds a great deal finer and more elevated. The complaisant man can scarcely have very much respect for himself if he acts up to his doctrine, even though pretty well assured that a fool or a rascal will be less confirmed in his evil course by insincere and over-courteous complaisance, which he can probably see through, than by reaction from the rigidity and brusqueness of the plain-dealer, which he bitterly detests. Nobody can keep his self-respect who holds a theory that is not decently presentable, though it may happen that the presentable theory, taken with all the numerous modifications required by circumstances, comes in practice to nearly the same thing as its ostensible opposite. It is better to hold a good theory, with occasional deflections, than a bad and cynical one, up to which we can always act in its integrity.

Still there is a course which lies at equal distances from both the objectionable doctrines. It is not necessary to be always telling your friend either obliging lies or disobliging truths. This might seem so obvious as not to be worth writing down, only the popularity of non-intervention in contemporary politics is apt to lead to the spread of a corresponding view in private relations. The moral influence of political doctrine upon social doctrine is always very important; and the notion

that you ought to see your neighbour march off to perdition, if he chooses, without an effort to keep him back, is sure to find favour in an age when so many spurious forms of *laissez-aller* obtain credit in the wider sphere of public affairs. Then, of course, in people of impetuous temper, this breeds an energetic reaction, and we are overwhelmed with torrents of plain-dealing and universal counselling.





## VIII.

### SOCIAL TROGLODYTES.



OME ancient writers have left us accounts of a curious race of people to whom they gave the name of Troglodytes. These strange beings had no houses, but lived in holes which they dug in the ground. They had no words with which to express such ideas as they may have possessed, but resorted to uncouth and inarticulate sounds. At the sight of a stranger they escaped swiftly into their holes, while even with one another they held but little intercourse. Various other particulars are recorded of their habits, all forming a most astonishing picture of what human nature can come to, or rather of what it could ascend from. Yet, after all, the lowest stages of civilization at different epochs are, as a rule, wonderfully like one another. Circumstances change and external

conditions alter, but an ingenious inquirer has no difficulty in tracing a substantial resemblance at bottom between the barbarousness of different periods. Even the most polished age is sure to contain a class of people in a stage of comparative barbarism. It would not be in any way surprising, therefore, if we should find that, after the lapse of so many hundreds of years, there are still those among us whom it is impossible not to recognise as the representatives of the ancient Troglodytes. This, indeed, proves to be the case. The Troglodyte is still among us, and we may still ponder, with as much interest as was felt by the old geographers, the habits and manners and feelings of this most extraordinary and entertaining creature. True, he no longer digs a hole in the earth to live in, and he conforms so far to the ways of his fellows as to use articulate words. We could not expect, however, to find minute resemblances in detail. It is enough to discover a similarity in main features. For, though the modern Troglodyte does not live in a hole, he is in one sense as remote from the haunts of mankind as if he were sojourning in the very bowels of the earth. He lives fenced round with an atmosphere, and that the very reverse of luminous, of dense moral isolation. What to others are the pleasures of social existence to him are its pains. What interests the more civilized portion of his contemporaries only



serves to bore him ; and this, not because he is a philosopher who views human desires and interests with indifference or contempt, or because he is a Puritan who views them with pious horror, or because he is absorbed in important business and cannot spare time for diversion, but simply because he is a Troglodyte. That is, his whole mental organization is low. His mind is pitched too flat. His interests and pleasures and pains are all duller and blunter than those of other people. He goes through the world in a sort of eyeless, disembodied fashion. Life is like a pale and blurred picture in his vision, or like a tiresome joke of which he cannot for the soul of him see the point, or like a stage-play with all the characters talking a language of which he understands no more than the auxiliary verbs. Of course, just as his ancient prototype could scratch up out of the earth the roots on which he lived, so the Troglodyte of to-day is at no loss how to make his subsistence. This scratching for roots is the single point of sympathy between himself and the outside world. It is the one human and social interest in which he feels any concern, and even in this he is incapable of zeal.

It is proper to distinguish the spirit of the genuine Troglodyte from mere shyness of manner. He is by no means necessarily one of those awkward people whom one may sometimes see in so-

ciety, shrinking under the general gaze, expressing the discomfort of their minds in the attitude of their bodies, and occasionally gaining confidence for a moment only to be plunged the moment after so much the deeper into despondency and terror. Nor is reserve, any more than bashfulness, the mark of the Troglodyte. Reserve implies in some measure the existence of vigorous qualities in the background. The Troglodyte never conceals, nor indeed affects to conceal, that he has none of these vigorous qualities, and that he has barely a notion either of their use to the world, or of the pleasure they confer upon anybody who is so fortunate as to possess them. The lethargy which hangs over his mind effectually unnerves him for even the appreciation of a vigour which only wearies and perplexes him.

As might be expected, the Troglodyte is more frequently to be found in the provinces than in the metropolis. In old country towns one is perpetually encountering whole colonies of them, distinctly organized upon Troglodytic principles. These little communities eat and drink, and marry and are given in marriage, very much to all appearance like their neighbours. It is not until you have mixed among them, and listened to their habitual talk, and collected their governing ideas, that their characteristic peculiarities are visible. An endeavour to introduce any of the subjects en-

gaging the most active minds of the day, or to discuss passing events as if they were actually taking place, meets with a chilling reception that might convince the most audacious that he is vainly trying to drag his companions into a region that is at once mysterious and hateful to them. They do not understand what he wants them to talk about, and they have not the faintest desire to understand it, but only wonder darkly, and almost malignantly, how any living being comes to worry himself about such things. What have they done that anybody should expect them either to know anything, or to feel any interest, about the results of the American war, or the coming Reform Bill, or Jamaica? Why should they be disturbed about theological or literary controversies? Even if they knew of the existence of such controversies, they would look with consuming envy upon the snug lives led by the Troglodytes of old time. Nobody came to bore *them* about the Peloponnesian war, or about the conflicts of rival sophists. They ate their roots, and burrowed in their holes, in unvexed contentment. But, alas, the golden age has passed for Troglodytes, as for all the world. They may, indeed, themselves abstain from "taking interest" and having "views," but they cannot, at the approach of pertinacious intruders who insist upon interest and views, retreat into inexpugnable caves and holes of the earth. Even the dullest of coun-

try towns is now and again enlivened and plagued by the advent of some chatterer who thinks that whatever concerns humanity concerns him too. As if it would make any difference to them whether the Federals beat the Confederates or not, whether Governor Eyre was right or wrong, whether species have their origin in natural selection or in distinct acts of creation ! The wise Troglodyte of the ancients did not care whether the Greeks beat back the Persians, or the Persians overcame the Greeks. His hole was as safe, and his supply of roots as certain, in one case as the other. And so, in modern times, the Troglodyte of the country town can make pretty sure of his dinner and his old port and his rubber, whether the borough franchise is lowered or not. Supposing he were to take the trouble of devoting to political or social study the time which, as it is, he consumes in the stolid and lethargic contemplation of things in general, he cannot see how either society or his own comfort would be benefited. The world would go on much as it does now, and he is incapable of guessing where there is any room for improvement, as far as he himself is concerned.

If a philosopher wishes to see this lethargic temper in its most intense and perfect form, he must study the female Troglodyte. The man, as we have said, is at least brought in contact with the interests of his kind in the business of bread-win-

ning; but the wife of his bosom and the partner of his dull joys is not reminded even in this way that she is a member of a complex and active society, and that there is a momentous and constant conflict of opinions and interests and ideas going on around her. There is something appalling in the sublime stupor, the death-like apathy, of women of this stamp about everything that goes on outside their own doors. The most exciting and important political debate rages about them, while they are lapped in the calmest unconsciousness. Or, if they are conscious, it is only as the "cold, silly female fool" mentioned by De Tocqueville was conscious, who complained that whenever Napoleon Bonaparte came to her house she had to leave the room, because he was "for ever talking his tiresome politics." The most interesting discovery in science may take place without even their having heard so much as whether there be any science or not. To literature and thought they maintain an attitude of positively stupendous indifference, as well the cause as the effect of an even more stupendous ignorance.

The most perfect type of Troglodytish women does not care even for theology or religion. But few among them attain to this lofty pitch of apathy. In an ordinary way, the single field, outside of the domestic cave, in which they permit themselves to disport their embryonic intellects, is a



little spot which they call their religion. Here they display a sort of alacrity which is more unbecoming than any amount of apathy. Here they are possessed by a sour, narrow, thin energy, which is all the more astonishing and disagreeable because we know that they have no reason for the faith that is in them, no benevolent or honest wish that truth should prevail, no sincere interest in the welfare of those whom they revile. It is simply the effervescence of those acrid and unwholesome mental humours that are bred by their mode of life. If a woman is to be a Troglodyte, she is pleasanter to her neighbours if she follows the ways of her tribe to the very end, and, excluding everything alike from her attention, never wanders out of the dim light of her own cave. For there is something of spite in the composition of the creature. And, this is no more than was the case with the tribe whom they so much resemble. This people, the old writers say, used to tie a corpse neck and heels together, and having hung it up, would proceed to pelt it with stones, amid loud roars of laughter. The grotesque ferocity of such proceedings gives one a capital notion of the nature of those few social pastimes in which the modern Troglodyte, more especially of the gentler sex, occasionally loves to indulge. When they do assemble and unite with other people, it is nearly always for pelting purposes. To tie up somebody who has



done something which, so far as they can understand, they do not like, and then to throw stones, amid laughs and showery titterings, at the wretched victim—this is the best fun they know. An heretical parson, or a woman who has found her way or been dragged into the Divorce Court, is equally good game. The scent of it brings them all rushing out of their holes with all manner of uncouth chucklings and mumblings; for most Troglodytes are social enough to be quite ready to wash their neighbour's dirty linen in public at a moment's notice. They are loath to let the dead bury their dead, to leave the heretic to deal with his own understanding, and the unfaithful wife to the misery which has befallen her. The rites and ordinances of the tribe have not been truly complied with until there has been a hoisting and pelting.

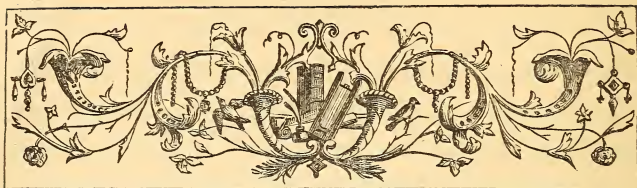
This unkindly knack throws some light upon the essential evil of the Troglodyte system of life. To be utterly devoid of interest in great transactions or ideas is to keep a house swept and garnished for the reception and entertainment of as many unclean spirits as choose to come in. Men and women who are unsocial on principle, who flee timidly and shyly into the cavernous obscurity of their holes whenever anybody approaches them with a question about their opinions on any matter of large import, who shirk public duties, and don't care for the public advantage, are pretty sure to

possess a taste, that constantly grows stronger, for petty scandals and gossipings, and for vexatious social persecutions. Quiet towns and pleasant villages seem to be mostly inhabited by people who are emphatically unsocial, and yet the conversation is mostly on trumpery items of scandal and dull personal news. To a bystander who is not of the tribe the process is stupid beyond description, but no doubt it would have seemed dull to an enlightened Greek to watch the Troglodytes pelt the carcase of a dead friend. Even this positive evil is a great deal less material and less lamentable than the absence of all those pleasures and refinements which belong to a thoroughly active and social mind, having a keen concern in everything that is going on under the sun. A man without arms and legs, and deaf and dumb, would not lose more that is worth hearing than is lost by one of these apathetic beings, whose minds never by any chance stray out of a certain dull and straitened path.

It is only in accordance with the inexorable conditions of our life, that in all cases the keenest interest is centred in what may seem narrow, small, and personal concerns. The greater part of most businesses in which men are engaged, and of the domestic arrangements which it is, or is traditionally supposed to be, the business of women to superintend, is mechanical, and, transcendently

viewed, even sordid. In the actual details of daily life it is impossible to avoid a great deal which is neither elevating nor beautiful, but in itself quite paltry and unedifying. It is perhaps a misfortune that we cannot live a pure and angelic kind of life, and enjoy an existence as bright and simple as that of Adam and Eve before the Fall. But as destiny does not permit a return to the ways of the golden age, we may at least find our account in doing whatever we can, by cultivating a habit of taking vivid interest in all that is passing in the world in practical exploit and speculation and art, to give existence an air of dignity and size and grandeur. Instead of this, the Troglodyte does his best to confine the functions of life to burrowing and scratching for roots, with an occasional pelting match for diversion.





## IX.

### TRIMMERS.



FRENCH newspaper, describing the villa of a retired Minister at Nice, informs us that in one of the rooms the visitor may see a bust of Napoleon I., presented by the great Emperor himself to the Minister's father. On the other side of the room is a bust of Louis Philippe, presented by the Citizen King. On the table is a richly bound copy of the 'History of Cæsar,' the gift of the Imperial author. The genius for friendship, implied in being the recipient of such compliments from such widely different quarters, may be looked at in two ways, according to one's habitual temperament. People of this kind, who always contrive to keep in with everybody, or at least never fall into the mistake of quarrelling with the wrong person, are so common, even in those parts of

society on which the personal favour of emperors and kings is not wont to shine, that most of us who think about conduct at all have a theory upon this universal complaisance. By some it is admired, as being the only temper which can secure to a man serenity of mind; and without serenity of mind, they say, he cannot make the best of his life. To others it is hateful, as being the sign either of an unworthy servility to what is bad, or else of a very shameful coolness as to the difference between what is bad and what is good. The one set of critics declare that a man is inexcusable who goes about passing judgment on his neighbours, and, so far as he can, executing his own decree. The others insist that you are bound to measure all conduct that comes under your observation by a just standard, and if it be found wanting in integrity, or in any of those other elementary qualities which are the salt of character, that it is a base thing to temporize and to make no sign of your opinion. It depends, therefore, on the view we are accustomed to take of the general question of compromise, whether we think it a mark of cleverness and wisdom, or of cunning and selfishness, to have in your room at the same time a present from Louis Philippe and a present from the ruler who is supposed to be the chief means of keeping Louis Philippe's children in exile. In our own country, so far as public ques-



tions are concerned, politics do not commonly place us in positions where we must either compromise or suffer. We are not called upon, like the Jacobite, to choose between the adroit compromise of toasting the Sovereign by passing the glass over the water-jug, and the pain of being sent to the Tower. If anybody, at Birmingham or elsewhere, should prefer drinking prospectively to the future President of the British Republic, the policeman at the door would only wonder what was the joke. The worst penalty of holding extreme political views at the present day consists in being looked upon as a fool by all the rest of the world; and this is a penalty which, from the very fact that he is capable of holding an extreme view, the man is not likely to feel at all troublesome. In theological matters there is a better opportunity for anybody with a taste for being a martyr. Here there are plenty of people, on both sides, always busied in efforts to crush the spirit of compromise. Those who believe most and those who believe least are equally urgent that there should be no wearing of masks, no crafty running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. A fanatical Legitimist would not think more meanly of a man who could have presents from the Napoleons as well as presents from the Orleanist princes, than a thoroughgoing English theologian on either side would think of the compromising Gallio who would



dine with an archbishop one day, and have half-a-dozen Essayists and Reviewers to breakfast the next morning.

It cannot be denied, however, that, on the whole, the temper of the age is all against martyrs. Most people zealously follow Polonius's injunction to Laertes :—

“ Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice ;  
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.”

Not to commit himself is the sum and substance of a modern father's advice to a son who has his way to make in the world. The more busts and presentation copies he can secure, the wiser will he be. He is persistently cautioned against any rash and mistimed self-assertion which might involve him in the same kind of chagrin which overtook the unfortunate lady whose pathetic story is told by Chamfort. The Abbé de Fleury was passionately enamoured of her. Instead of prudently temporizing with her admirer, she treated him with the most overwhelming disdain. He became the great Minister, and it happened on one occasion that she wanted an important favour from him. He reminded her of her former rigour. “ *Ah, monseigneur,*” she most reasonably demanded, “ *qui l'aurait pu prévoir ?*” This defect of foresight is what should never occur in a thoroughly well-regulated mind, and the greatest care is now taken to instil the lesson, which is perhaps less

disreputable in substance than in sound, never on any account to offend anybody who may, under any possible set of circumstances, be useful to you. And, as a man with a vigorous imagination can scarcely meet with a single person who might not in some extraordinary conjuncture do him a service, this injunction is naturally expanded into the broad lesson that you should be always on the alert not to offend or annoy anybody in the world. The worst calamity that a person of this stamp is capable of conceiving is the mortification of knowing that he has unconsciously incurred anybody's displeasure, no matter how mean and unworthy and generally despicable the displeased creature may be. This mortification is not necessarily the result of an apprehension that he may possibly have lost some substantial good from the man, along with his mere approbation or intimacy. An ever-present fear of saying or doing something which somebody may not like, a timorous dislike of having an unfavourable word said of one, grows upon those who yield to it, without any reference to selfish feelings about material loss or gain.

It is clear that neither this, nor anything like this, deference and unlimited conciliatoriness belongs to the highest type of character. A man who is for ever protesting against this or that, who cannot let any trifle pass without deliberately registering his disapproval, is doubtless a nuisance,

and what he affects to consider the courageous expression of an unpopular view is in truth the ostentatious airing of his own vanity and conceit. The habit of systematically despising all your neighbours, and of continually quarrelling with whatever they do and think, is fully as objectionable as a habit of mentally bowing and scraping before them. But it is probably not so bad for the man himself. A jealousy about taking the course which others have recommended, or which he knows that they would be likely to recommend, is horribly unamiable, and it is very tormenting both to the person who is actuated by it and to all with whom he has to hold intercourse. Still a cross-grained disposition such as this is not at all incompatible with energy and an ill-conditioned sort of honesty. The other extreme of a timorous subservience to the good opinion of everybody who chooses to have an opinion about one is absolutely fatal to every virtue in the list of virtues. It has been said that the meek are blessed, for they shall inherit the earth. But there are obviously two sorts of meekness. The one makes a man think little of himself in comparison with some exalted ideal. It does not mean an unreasonable disparagement of our own powers or merits in favour of those of other people, or a humble fetching and carrying in obedience to the views and feelings of indifferent persons, who have no better means of

forming sound views than we have ourselves, and whose feelings ought only to count for something after it has been ascertained that we have none of our own. At a time when the tremendous spread of wealth has begotten in most men a strong desire for material comfort and the luxurious decorations of life, which on the whole can be more easily and certainly secured by compliance than by anything like self-assertion, there is an irresistible inducement to this general conformity. To be in all things of a neutral tint is the secret of that sort of success which is most coveted by average minds. The consequences of this colourless moderation upon the robustness of character which it is so desirable to maintain are plain and inevitable. The smugness bred in a man who has made it the prime effort of his life to please other people, and who has been all things to all men with success, is a far more unmistakeable proof of weakness than any amount of arrogance and self-confidence. The excess of self-confidence is a mistake, but it may be justified by achievements. Smug humility is a mistake too ; it means nothing, in most cases, but a very sly selfishness.

The social trimmer often refreshes himself in his course by recalling the old saying that we ought always to treat our friend as though he might one day be our enemy, and our enemy as though he might one day be our friend. He forgets that this

is one of those half-truths which are only meant for special application. It is a useful and a just thing to say to men of an extravagantly ardent and impetuous temperament. Volatile and capricious people, who love their friends for a while with a childish enthusiasm, and then presently hate them with a childish fury, may be induced by such a maxim to moderate their excesses. But the moment it is expanded into a precept for universal and unconditional use, enjoining us to quench the fire of a just enmity, and to moderate discreetly the flow of generous and tender sympathy, then it becomes simply the expression of a form of prudence than which it is impossible to conceive anything more profoundly low-minded. The high-minded man knows that there are some whom he is obliged to stoop to call enemies, for lack of another word, and whom nothing short of a complete and disastrous revolution in his own character could make into any other than enemies. Somebody in a novel says, with reference to somebody else who has been guilty of a shameful wrong, "I shall be a villain on the day I shake that man's hand." This is not the sign of a malignant and unforgiving temper, but of a robust hate of meanness and iniquity and cold-blooded wrongdoing. The systematic trimmer would not refuse the friendly advances of the most impenitent villain that ever lived. He would not clasp him to his

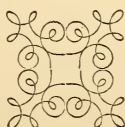


bosom, because this is inconsistent with trimming principles ; but he would treat him very much as he treats the most honest of his friends, and he cannot do more.

Contempt for trimmers is apt, with rash minds, to produce an error on the other side, and to make them morbidly anxious to express their likes and dislikes, their approval and disapproval, when no rational purpose is served by this vigorous dissidence. They are quite uneasy until they have disburdened their feelings. And they like being on the unpopular side, not exactly out of mere crotchettiness, but because, having accustomed themselves to dispute the will of the prosperous and the majority, they acquire a permanent taste for being in the minority. As soon as the minority becomes victorious, then it seems that their occupation is gone. They suddenly discover all the merits of the cause that has been vanquished, and are half-repentant at the victory they helped to gain. They feel most at home when they are assailing a popular idol, and showing their disrespect for him. If there is anything to be gained by espousing one side or taking one course rather than another, this in itself constitutes a good reason against such a course. In the same way, they see all the good points of their enemies, and do not object to expatiate on them, while to the good points of their friends they feel it a duty to be



very blind. If a man can be useful to them, they are disposed to treat him with a certain stiffness and distrust. In short, at every point they love to prove themselves impracticable and awkward. The sort of man who keeps in with everybody, who can have books and busts from all sides, is at least much pleasanter than people of *this* temper.





## X.

### SHORT CUTS.



PROFESSOR at Heidelberg is said to have lately offered a very handsome prize for the best essay which shall be sent in, showing how to remove despotic and unconstitutional Cabinets from office, without resorting to the barbarous method of a revolution. One thousand florins will reward the ingenious inventor of the most practicable solution of the problem, while the sagacious donor, whose proposal is made "in the interest of the science of the law," will have the satisfaction, worth many thousand millions of florins, of knowing that he has been the means of promoting a discovery compared with which every other that has ever been made is valueless and clumsy. Many people will at once exclaim that such a notion is just what we expect from Professors, particularly

German Professors. It never would occur to anybody but a professor that a bloodless moral siege might be laid to men like Von Bismarck, or Strafford, or Napoleon Bonaparte, which would constrain them to lay down their unconstitutional arms and surrender at discretion. It is conjectured to be the business of this distinguished order to devise absurdities at which wiser men laugh. Grown-up practical people are amused by them, just as the robust and sound boys of a village divert themselves with the vagaries of the parish idiot. Yet, after all, it is not certain that the Heidelberg Don Quixote is so much sillier than the rest of mankind. He only wants to find out a short cut to a place which, as is visible enough to less eager people, can only be reached by a toilsome journey along the high-road. We may think him a dreamy blockhead for supposing that there can be such a thing as a short road to the results of revolution without undergoing the turmoil and disturbance of revolution, just as we should if he offered his thousand florins for the best way of teaching little boys Latin without giving them the trouble of learning. It is barely possible that the Professor may be indulging in a very elaborate piece of humour. Perhaps we shall presently see announced that no essay was worthy of the prize, and that therefore the task of showing how a strong unconstitutional Cabinet can be deposed without a revo-

lution is one to solve which all the essay-writers in Germany are incompetent. But most of us act on just the same principle in matters that interest us as keenly as the freedom of his country interests the German Professor, and in which to our neighbours we seem to be quite as foolish. To desire to possess, without being burdened with the trouble of acquiring, is as much a sign of weakness, as to recognize that everything worth having is only to be got by paying its price is the prime secret of practical strength. A few seemingly lucky mortals get their penny for their hour's work, while the rest have had to bear the heat and burden of the day for it. This is obviously the exception, not the rule. And even here, the question of luck turns upon the comparative pleasure of standing idle all the day about the market-place, or spending the time in honest work. Perhaps the men who enjoy both the penny and the labour are better off, if they only knew their own good, than the men who have the penny only and lose the labour. At all events, the temper of modern times is altogether in this direction. But, be the delight in labour ever so vigorous, it is always less strong than the delight in the successful results of labour. One may very distinctly prefer industry to indolence, the healthful exercise of all one's faculties to allowing them to rest unused in drowsy torpor. In the long-run, we shall probably find

that the exercise of the faculties has of itself been the source of a more genuine happiness than has followed the actual attainment of what the exercise was directed to procure. Still, when a man looks either backward or forward upon his life, he is accustomed to measure its success in the one case by the specific ends which he has achieved, and in the other by those which he hopes to achieve. The spaces between, which are of more real moment, he is most concerned to make as short as possible. It does not produce any difference in his zeal in getting over the ground to know that, as soon as the next point is reached, he will only have the sooner to commence another and another stage. He loses three-fourths of the pleasure of the journey through a headlong anxiety to get safely to the end of it.

Unfortunately, there are also a great many stages which only the very grandest of philosophers can bring themselves to look upon as anything but grievous and wearisome. In fact, whenever the object is one that is desired with sufficient eagerness, the path that we have to traverse before reaching it is sure to seem never-ending, and beset with thorns and stony places. And as most people desire something very strongly which is not immediately within their reach, most people know what it is to see one of these long, straight, dusty, unshaded pieces of road in front of them,

and to yearn for a shorter cut. One of the most important of the many differences between wise men and fools is that the one put no trust in short cuts, while the other are continually wasting time and hope and energy in trying to find them, and then in floundering back into the main road again, to see the wise man ever so many miles ahead of them.

And of all the short cuts by which it is proposed to avoid the inevitable, none is so popular, or so delusive either, as that in which the Heidelberg Professor advertises his belief—the conviction that we are sure to arrive safely and easily at the end of the journey if we will only talk and write perseveringly enough. We shall get all we want if we write prize essays, or, supposing we cannot write them, if we diligently read them. Observe, all this does not mean that we are to wile the tedium of the way with talk, but that talk is to be our single motive-power. Suppose a man has allowed a number of bad habits to get the mastery over him, if he is of the professorial temperament, he will shudder at the thought of dispelling his tyrants by setting a violent moral revolution on foot within his own mind. He wants a more comfortable method, and he would gladly give a thousand florins, or any other sum, to some ingenious person who could instruct him in the delightful art of exterminating vices without pain



or confusion. The idea of recovering moral freedom by a courteous, gentle, sympathetic treatment of oneself is not at all more chimerical than the dream of recovering political freedom by polite suasion and prize essays. There is some novelty in the introduction of this idea into public affairs. Among individuals it is perhaps as old as the race. It is natural that people should shrink from what is painful, and we cannot reasonably expect a man to admit with cheerful alacrity that the disorder from which he knows himself to be suffering can only be successfully dealt with by means of knife and cautery. He prefers to delude himself with the hope that a few doses of not too unpleasant physic will work as complete a cure as he stands in need of. In the case of bodily ills, this playing the fool with himself is sure to come pretty speedily to its end. The body revenges itself for all these cheats that are attempted to be put upon it with swift and visible vengeance. But the more perseveringly and audaciously a man cajoles his moral sight, the more tricks he plays with his own self-respect, the less sensible does he become of the mischief that he is breeding within himself, and the more facile a prey to renewed cajoleries and more infatuated deceptions. He thinks he has found a short and easy method of attaining virtue and highmindedness, when in truth he is only sinking more and more inextricably into their

opposites. This is the sure fate of everybody who declines to face the toils and burden of the road, who, finding himself enslaved by follies or vices, and preserving enough moral sense to recognize that the true goal is wisdom and virtue, yet dreads to encounter the strangeness and the roughness and the unwelcome hardness of a new set of habits.

Some men flatter themselves that they have an uncommon eye for moral country. They admit that in seeking for happiness by self-indulgence they have somehow gone wrong, and got no nearer to the desired end. But they will not listen to a suggestion that they should return, with what force is left them, into the neighbourhood of the beaten track, and they stubbornly refuse to recognize that they have got themselves into a moral *cul-de-sac*. Insisting that they discern this or that way out of the maze, they only get from one alley to find themselves fast enclosed in another. The silver thread of self-denial which would conduct them back into the path is unobserved, while their feet wander at random wherever an uncontrolled inclination leads them. In spite of the wretchedness which this, for a time, may entail, they take heart of grace, and even while convinced that they have irrecoverably lost their way, they still prefer the snugness of their *cul-de-sac* to the frowsy career of the Puritan or the hide-bound moral pedant. For-

tunately, this is not the true alternative. But even those whom weakness of will, or a too great eagerness to reach by a short cut what is only attainable by prolonged plodding, or a radical misconception not only of the way to happiness but of its very nature, has led into straits and shallows, are not even there free from the tendency to Pharisaism which is so strong in every sort and condition of men. There is such a thing as a kind of inverted Pharisaism, and it is no paradox to say that there are sinners and publicans in abundance who constantly thank Heaven that they are not as other men are—meaning, by other men, the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

Besides the self-indulgent temper which leads men to take what with unsuitable subtlety they think a short cut to happiness generally, there is a certain sort of impetuosity which impels others to go through life seeking each particular object they desire on the same principle. They are concerned with ends only, and are indifferent about the means, even comprising in that indifference what to others are not only means but ends at the same time. Provided a thing be done, the shorter and more expeditious the way of doing it the better for everybody interested. In an age which chiefly prides itself on the speed of its locomotives, on the rapidity of its telegraphic communication,

on the arrangements which permit you to sup in London and breakfast in Edinburgh the next morning, there is nothing surprising in the prevalence of such a way of looking at the affairs of life in general. The extension of business principles to matters that belong to a different sphere may be illogical, but it is not unnatural. The immoderate haste, the matter-of-fact fashions of the business world, cannot but infect the world outside. In the transaction of affairs, dispatch, promptitude, straightforward unadorned speech, are the most useful qualities. The shortest cut is always the best. But in the general conduct of life this haste to get to the end prevents you from seeing all the finer sights on the road. Unremitting thought how you may shorten the way from here to yonder leaves no liberty for harbouring the richer thoughts, which would flow in from every side to the man who had a mind to make the best of his life's course as it went on. The notion that if a thing is to be done at all, "then 'twere well 'twere done quickly," admirable as it may be on the Exchange, rubs the delicacy and bloom off life when it is made the ruling maxim in all other relations and positions. A leisurely life, with time for contemplation, and for watching and examining all that we pass, is a much more enviable and rational lot than a swift rushing from one goal to another, from one sort of fame of power or opu-

lence to another and more remote. Nothing can in a general way involve a much greater waste of life than a passion for the shortest cut, whether it be to obtain something agreeable or to escape what is disagreeable.





## XI.

### YOUTHFUL PROMISE.



It is as great a puzzle to know what becomes of all the promising young men, as it was to the little girl of the story where on earth all the bad people were buried. Most persons have at one time or another congratulated themselves on possessing a child of remarkable promise, and then been awakened to see a most ordinary and commonplace fulfilment. Fortunately they have, as a rule, acquired sense enough in the interval to enable them to bear the disappointment with proper resignation. For the ambition of parents for their children, like the ambition on their own behalf, undergoes wonderful changes as their experience of the world grows wider. The father who gives a tip to his boy for getting to the top of his class is apt to entertain a vague and complacent conviction that he is rearing



an archbishop or a chancellor or a great author, just as his own tastes may happen to lie. But ten years later he is amazingly pleased to learn that his lad evinces a genius for book-keeping by double-entry, and for mounting his high stool with punctuality. Just in the same way, the lad's ambition gets gradually modified. What at first would have seemed a pitiful aim indeed slowly assumes the proportions of a crowning success. In life, as in other journeys, distances are wonderfully deceptive; and the peaks and pinnacles which to the ardour and inexperience of youth seem quite close at hand, and easily accessible, generally turn out to be ever so remote, and only surmountable, if at all, by vigorous and prolonged efforts, for which only a few constitutions, specially trained and circumstanced, are hardy and agile enough.

One great secret of the exaggerated notions entertained about promising youths is the confusion of conduct with capacity, of goodness with power. By promise, people must commonly mean promise of those things in gaining which intellectual ability tells more than any quantity of well-regulated affections and decorous counting-house virtues. They mean those great professional prizes, and lofty political positions, and grand literary reputations which are won by vigour, acuteness, breadth, or profundity of understanding. The grounds on which a lad earns a reputation for promise are, in

an ordinary way, exclusively moral grounds. He is industrious, persevering, docile, well-mannered. He always knows his lessons, and is never insolent or quarrelsome. And this sort of "good boy" may very well be called a boy of promise, and it is probable that his life will be one of more even happiness than that of the boy of fulfilment. But then the results which he is likely to achieve, satisfactory as they may be in themselves, are not at all those which his too partial friends delight to anticipate for him. Punctuality and conformity to discipline, and an aversion to blots and dog-eared books and the ruder tastes of his compeers, are very excellent things, and they certainly promise a tombstone on which the characteristics of a tender husband, a good father, and a just citizen will have more than their conventional significance.

Still, friends, ambitious by proxy, aspire to something more than an unusually truthful tombstone. An immortal poem, or a series of unrivalled orations, or a history which shall live as long as our language, or a political wisdom and beneficence which shall win the undying gratitude of the poor—this is the kind of object which they expect their promising favourite to propose to himself and to attain. The most saintly abhorrence of blots, unfortunately, is not the only requisite for a great poet, perhaps is no requisite at all. The youth who has never in his life disobeyed a master, or

neglected the smallest monition of his college-tutor, or once missed attendance at chapel, may still not be eloquent or profound. Charles James Fox, as he appeared at the gambling-table with his coat turned inside out for luck, or lying in the hot weather pretty nearly stark naked on the sofa, would scarcely have been thought a young man of promise. Yet he was a man of fulfilment for all that. He would have done a great deal more if he had not frequented the tables, no doubt; but he is one out of ten thousand illustrations of the commonplace that a man may make a great mark in spite of almost every vice that human nature can fall into. And it is this making a great mark which is predicted when a young man is said to be of wonderful promise.

Of course the converse error is much more pernicious and stupid, though it is not at all rare, of arguing that he must be a genius who displays an habitual disregard of the proprieties of conduct. Lying about without clothes in hot weather, or hastening to ruin on the Turf, is no sure guarantee for the possession of eloquence or political ability or anything else. A total disrespect for the good opinion of persons around one may, on certain subjects, be a very wholesome and promising characteristic, and the person whom it marks may do excellent service both to himself and others in virtue of it; but where an ignoble kind of self-

indulgence prompts this disrespect, it can only, in spite of the example of Fox and plenty of others, prove a hindrance to him at every point. Hence the infatuated folly of parents, or of the young men themselves, who mistake all sorts of sheer bad habits for spirit and originality; the truth being that neither bad habits nor good habits are the cause or the measure of that native vigour of mind which lies at the root of the most conspicuous and glittering of the successes of life.

This vigour can only be tested, if at all, in the most hopelessly imperfect way during the time of youth; and so people form their judgments of a man's future from one or two moral qualities, which in truth have much less to do with the kind of future they are thinking about than the intellectual qualities which they have scarcely any trustworthy means of measuring. We nearly always find in the biographies of distinguished men, that at school or college they gave no remarkable sign of their future power; and even where this is not the case, the predictions of greatness may commonly be traced to a time after the greatness had been achieved. The child may, in a sense, be father to the man; and nobody of any judgment will deny that we are born with peculiar temperaments and our own individual predispositions. But character is the compound product of predispositions and experience. You cannot predict any-

thing of the product until you know something of the second of these factors, and even then it is unsound to argue that the combination of what seem like the same temperaments with what appears to be the same sort of experience will always be identical. Experience, or perhaps we should rather say the demand for independent action, every day gives rise to conduct which astounds us and mystifies all our calculations. It is impossible to be quite sure how a boy or a young man will turn out after he has looked out upon the world beyond the class-room. This uncertainty is notorious, even in respect of the moral half of character. Lads who have been angels with pure white wings up to one-and-twenty not seldom develop—by a process, we suppose, of natural selection—into imps with horrid horns and hoofs before they have left home a twelvemonth. But the influence of the demands of life upon the intellectual part of men is often still more extraordinary and still more unforeseeable.

Some, whom on account of their school-room virtues their friends insisted on raising aloft on pedestals, no sooner get fairly out into the big world than they seem to be scared by the size of things, and to be utterly lacking in that intrepidity of the intellect which is so needful for great successes. Others, again, whose intellectual energies have hitherto passed for second-rate, and of whom



nobody entertained very sanguine hopes, have their imagination excited, their faculties braced, all their powers stimulated, by the novelty and bustle and Brobdignagian dimensions of the new scene to which they are introduced. The nature of this impression, and the way in which it strikes people of different original quality, are points nearly always overlooked in talk about early promise.

Intellectual intrepidity, as it is one of the most vital conditions of that eminent success which people urgently desire for their sons or their friends, is just that at which men of promise ordinarily stop short of fulfilment. With manful assurance they march up to the fight, but discretion suddenly steps in and freezes their intent. Everybody understands what this means in a physical conflict, but not everybody discerns how the same thing may occur to men who think of entering the arena where the contest is not waged with the arm of flesh. We all admire the courage which enables a man to lead his men against a battery or to join a forlorn hope, and we admit that such a virtue is the first essential of a successful warrior. But we do not usually understand how much the same quality, only intellectual instead of physical, is needed in a man who sits down to write the history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, or of Modern Civilization, or who aspires to be a conspicuous power in the political world, or



to attain distinguished success in science or philosophy. Yet these are the results too commonly anticipated in the expression that So-and-so, under five-and-twenty, is a person of great promise; which, being interpreted, means that he is industrious and of good morality, and decently intelligent. That he should be all this is, as we have already said, promising, but only as far as it goes. It promises comfort and good repute, and nothing else; and even then the promise is not worth much, as a thing to rely on, when we reflect how often the first whiff of the world blows away the surface habits of youth into space, making all clean and garnished for the reception of seven or some other number of devils and unclean spirits.

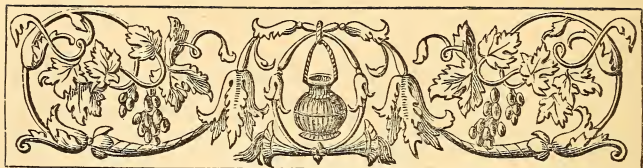
But exemplary conduct is not the only thing from which promise is wrongly inferred. It is equally common to find people mistaking ambition for capacity. The strength of the passion for fame is supposed to be some measure of the intellectual strength required for gratifying it, and foolish persons fancy that, if a young man only starts in life with a sufficiently vehement desire to get to the top of the tree, he cannot fail. Put in a point-blank way, nobody could be taken in by the fallacy; only people do not put things to themselves in this way. We are always more or less ready to take appearance for reality in matters which do not concern ourselves personally in any very ur-

gent degree, and to allow people to pass themselves off at their own estimate. So if a young fellow gives one to understand, quietly of course, and without braggadocio or bluster, that he has a vehement desire—and in the days of youth desire is synonymous with intention—to rise to eminence in some given line, one is disposed to give him credit for possessing the ability which the attainment of his desire would imply. Hence he is given out to be a man of extraordinary promise—promise in this case only meaning what his conceit and rash confidence promise to themselves, and not what his abilities justify.

After all, the misunderstanding of what constitutes promise is only a branch of the wider ignorance of the conditions of success generally. Dr. Johnson we think it was who said that youth always miscalculates two things—the value of money, and the difficulty of reaching eminence. Young men disregard and waste the one, and they think they can have the other by merely wishing and asking. But is youth the only age at which one calculates the pains of winning distinction far below their true magnitude? Does not everybody, except those who have already tried to advance some way up the steep path, think the ascent a great deal easier than it is? True, there are crowds of impostors in the Temple of Fame, who have got up where they are by bubbles or balloons.

But they are only there for a time. Perhaps it may comfort men who discover that what they or their friends mistook for promise is nothing of the sort, to reflect that even those who most deserve eminence only enjoy it for a while. And, besides that, the atmosphere of these lofty peaks would most likely prove not at all congenial to those others whom nature and circumstances have united to fit for the plain.





## XII.

### CROSSING RUBICONS.

**I**T is not at all surprising to find that Cæsar himself makes no mention of the scene on the banks of the Rubicon out of which subsequent chroniclers invented the famous legend. In all momentous enterprises, whether they are of national or only of private dimensions, men rather shirk the recognition of a final and decisive step, than seek a dramatic excitement from the knowledge that the die is cast. They are scarcely likely to find any comfort in the reflection that they are just on the point of doing something which they will never on any conditions be able to undo. Probably even the most resolute disposition is glad to hide from itself the iron bonds which it has just forged. It is only a fool who can cross his Rubicon, either to enslave a people or to marry a wife, with a gleeful

enjoyment of the consciousness that he is doing for himself, one way or another. It is all very well, on the stage or in novels, for a hero to march off to death or victory with an elated stride, and with a fine apophthegm on his lips, but in real life the tremendous significance of the alternative presents itself a great deal too forcibly and nakedly to allow of much of this magnificent hilarity. To a cool outsider, the cry of "Death or Victory," "Splendour or Ruin," has the sound and air of a very fine antithesis about it. For the combatant himself there is somewhat too much at stake to leave his mind quite free to appreciate the charming antithetical completeness of the two possible terminations of his undertaking. It is certainly pleasanter, from the dramatic point of view, to picture to oneself Julius Cæsar, amid the acclamations of his soldiers, dashing across the ford and crying "*Be the die cast*," than to think of that other Cæsar of more modern times sitting, on the corresponding occasion, pale, bloodless, and silent, gnawing his nails over the fire at the Élysée. But the last is the truer type of the behaviour of men at the decisive epochs of life—that is to say, provided they know that the epoch is decisive.

Only it happens to most of us that we cross the Rubicon without any notion that it differs from all the other streams that encounter us in the journey. We are ignorant that the passage of this particular

boundary commits us to a definite or hazardous course for the rest of our days. The die is thrown without anybody knowing it, and it is not till afterwards that one discovers which face came uppermost. But this is a commonplace. The most fifth-rate novelist in the world can expatiate upon it through endless pages of pathetic moralizings. "Ah, little did she know that he whose name she then heard for the first time, and whom she was that day about to meet, would have his fate inextricably bound up with her own sad destiny. O my friends, if we all only knew," and so on. Every other novel we read has something in this strain. Such pathos, easy and on the surface as it is, seldom fails of a certain effect.

There is no sort of depth in such a set of reflections, because they are only sentimental variations of the very obvious and not very practical truth that we cannot foresee the future, with the corollary that, if we could, we should most likely act differently from the way in which we act as it is. The fashion of growing tearful over any of the inexorable conditions of life, from death, the most inexorable of them all, downwards, engenders a state of feeling as little profitable as any that one can imagine. The relations between men and women are a very favourite field for these windy reflections. It certainly is rather sad and startling to think that you may possibly at the last croquet



party have met a young lady who is destined to embitter the rest of your days, and bring your grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. But then anybody who habitually yielded to this cheerful tone of thought would either baffle his destiny by avoiding all young ladies, or else would anticipate its horrors in these preliminary apprehensions. The only practical good that can arise from observing how unconsciously we may take the most decisive steps for good or for evil is that it may teach us to cultivate such a general habit of wise thinking and wise acting as to lessen, and in some matters almost to destroy, the chances of being hurried across the fatal stream unawares.

The worst of it is that even this is only a faint sort of protection, because the fact of somebody else having taken a decisive step is constantly just as weighty for you as if it had been your own doing. The Pompeians crossed no Rubicon, but Cæsar's doing so was fully as momentous to them as anything they could have done for themselves. It is very proper and elevating to believe that "Man is man and master of his fate." Practically this is by far the most important and the most worthy aspect of human action, and to lose sight of this as the greatest of all principles in its kind is to suffer a complete moral paralysis. Only, in surveying life, it is childish not to see that a man is not by any means the only master of his own fate.

It has been said of politics, but it is still more widely true, that "*Le coupable a souvent disparu quand le châtiment arrive.*" His father and mother, and all the generations before them, have something to do with it, and so have his children. The misery which befalls a mother who has been bereaved of her child is an element in her fate over which she can have no mastery, and so are ten thousand other things which must inevitably enter into the lot of a social being with any relation or dealings with his neighbours or the species at large. The certainty, however, that one may, and very often does, cross the Rubicon by proxy, or suffer the consequences of other people's exploits, is not a wholesome or useful thing to reflect upon. It is very apt to saddle a man with the snug, but particularly unprofitable habit of letting himself off too lightly and easily; and anything which tends ever so remotely to diminish the sense of each man's strict responsibility for his own conduct is best kept in the background.

There is a great difference between unwillingness to think very much about the tremendous consequences which may follow upon having taken a decisive step, and an habitual unwillingness to take the step itself. The one implies merely a sober caution of mind; the other entails all the dire miseries of helpless irresolution. A not infrequent result of these miseries is to drive the sufferer into

an opposite habit of over-quick resoluteness. A readiness in a man to exult in the fact that he has done something which he cannot undo, that he has pledged himself to a course from which he cannot draw back, is more commonly the sign of a weak than of a strong nature. The comfort of plunging right into the stream is unspeakable to anybody who has been accustomed to stand shivering and irresolute on the bank. When a person of this sort has brought himself to take the plunge, his exultation and fearlessness are wonderful. The knowledge that the Rubicon is crossed, and the die cast, seems to relieve him from the necessity of further resolution. He has set in motion a machine which will of itself wind off results and consequences for him without more ado on his own part; and this is an order of release from the demands of circumstance upon his will, for which he cannot be too thankful. So he comes at last really to be fond of crossing Rubicons, and taking decisive measures, just because they are decisive. A good many people, one fancies, get married on this principle. They persuade themselves that marriage is a yoke, pleasant or otherwise, which they are destined one day to go under. But the labour of exercising a very careful and deliberate choice is more than they can bear; so they rush blindly across the stream, really relieved at being able to cry out "*Alea jacta est.*" In too many

cases, this method may remind us of Mr. Micawber's exclamation when he had satisfied his creditor by a bill at three months—"There! thank God, that's paid!" It is not good, in the delightful sense of freedom after having done something decisive, to forget that rather grave part of the transaction—its consequences. The enormous relief of having decided somehow is perhaps too dearly bought if it should in time appear that the decision was the wrong one.

The same tendency to quick and resolute decisions, which may give relief to weak natures in one way, may in another way possess a very fatal attraction for strong natures too. A weak man will trust to a throw of the die as lief as anything else, because he has not force of character enough to compel his judgment to strike a balance between opposing considerations and bring out a clear practical conclusion. A strong man—strong in will and foresight, that is—may be equally tempted to trust almost to chance to fix his line of conduct for him. He may realize so clearly the thousand complexities which enter into every man's life, he may be so penetrated with a sense of the extraordinary way in which unforeseen circumstances arise to divert the channel which he would like to mark out, as to place comparatively small value on the most deliberate efforts of his own judgment to hit on the right courses. Or the point in his fortunes

may be so critical that he loses his nerve, and thinks that drawing lots, or tossing up a coin, or the *sortes Virgilianæ*, will answer quite as well as any other means for finding out the best thing to be done. The Roman legend about Cæsar was that, in the midst of his hesitation, there suddenly appeared a comely and god-like youth playing on a pipe, until, suddenly throwing aside the pipe, he snatched a trumpet, and with a mighty war-like blast plunged into the waters of the Rubicon. The miraculous apparition filled the leader with an instant and vigorous resolution which plain reason had wholly failed to inspire. There is a great deal of figurative truth in this. People no longer believe that comely divinities appear to a man in a crisis of his fortunes, but the comely divinity is not without his counterpart. Things no less unreal occupy his place in critical moments. In marriage, for example, are not men and women constantly led to take the irrevocable step, not by the conclusions of reason and judgment, but because they are beckoned on by seemly apparitions whom at the other side of the stream they see no more? And they do this consciously and deliberately, from some sort of superstition, it would seem, that a crisis in their affairs is so momentous a thing that at this, rather than other times, they ought to surrender their cool judgment to a spectre or a fancy.

Considering these and a hundred other infirmi-



ties of ordinary human character, it is not a little fortunate that there are 'so few opportunities for a man to take an irretrievably wrong turning. Everybody is pretty sure to miss his way more or less, but there are not so many turnings in life in which people can finally lose themselves beyond hope of recovery. The fatal turnings are there, unfortunately, in abundance, but with most of us education and tradition and surrounding example make it morally impossible that we should be deceived by them. It is perhaps startling to reflect how many people are honest, say, not on first principles, but simply through the influence of tradition. They have never gone further or deeper than the tradition, and have scarcely thought about the principles at all. The same may be said about a good many other virtues of old and established repute. And so, at a crisis in his life, a man's conduct is vastly influenced by the general views entertained about similarly critical junctures in the case of other people. Julius Cæsar crossed the Rubicon dramatically and heroically, but his soldiers crossed it like sheep. And this is the style in which the majority of us perform the same momentous exploit. We put confidence in Cæsar, or Mrs. Grundy, or whoever may be our favourite leader, and plunge in without much thought, whether it is a Rubicon or a duckpond that lies in front of us.





### XIII.

#### UNFAIR ADVANTAGES.



VERY limited observation of the ways of the world is enough to show one how the tremendous struggle for social existence and supremacy is apt, in all but exceptionally generous natures, to develop a certain meanness towards competitors. The struggle is so severe, and the powers and merits of the rivals are commonly so very nearly equal in the balance, that the slightest favouring circumstance is eagerly seized, without a too careful scrutiny of the fairness or worthiness of taking such an advantage. Nobody can be blamed for doing his best to get on in the world; in other words, to procure as much of reputation and wealth and power, and all the other pleasant and desirable things of the world, as he honestly can. It would be a serious misfortune if men with superior powers

were to give up using them, in order that their pre-eminence might cease to hurt the feelings of weaker brethren. Neither Christian charity nor any other admitted virtue entails upon men the obligation of weighting themselves down to the capacity of their dullest and feeblest neighbours. The philosophers who have amused themselves by founding great Utopian commonwealths sometimes proscribe competition, and fix the clever and industrious people of a society immovably in the same position as that taken by the blockheads and sluggards. This error is one to which our own age is least of all exposed. We are much more likely to fall into its opposite of spurring on ability too hotly, and depreciating the function of blockheads too impatiently. One consequence of this exaltation of intellectual power is that everybody, the dunce included, aspires and makes a claim to it; and so an inclination is begotten to be for ever measuring ourselves with other people, our capacity with their capacity, our opportunities with their opportunities, our success at a certain age with theirs at the same age, our prospects with their prospects.

A wise man—we do not mean a clever man only—will not fall into this hurtful habit. Of course he cannot help occasionally comparing what he thinks he can do, and what he knows he has done, with the capabilities and achievements of men who

started in the race<sup>o</sup> by his side, or whose labours have been carried on in his own department; but the occasions for this sort of comparison will be avoided, and when they are forced upon him he will not make too much of them. At all events he will not insist upon standing back to back with everybody he meets, and crying out to the onlookers to observe the distinct hundredth part of an inch by which he tops his man. Yet there are plenty of people—people, too, who are sharp-sighted enough to know better—with whom this is an invariable practice. A person of this stamp, whenever he hears of a distinguished or successful man, straightway puts the distinguished man into one dish of an imaginary balance and himself into the other. There is no difficulty in guessing the nature of the process which is gone through, or of the results which it most satisfactorily establishes. The number of allowances which are made, and the ingenious makeweights which find their way into the dish of the man who is weighing himself, are inexhaustible. The opportunities of his adversary—the possession of a competency, the enjoyment of more vigorous health, the greater freedom from family encumbrances, and a thousand other considerations, partly real and partly imaginary—serve to lighten the genuine merit of the one to a wonderful extent, and are so much, therefore, on the side of the other. The man even whose life has been the

greatest failure need never despair of being able to compare his character favourably with that of men who have attained the most marked success. A judicious modification of their excellences, and an exaggeration of their opportunities, combined with a candid but discreet avowal of his own faults and a modest statement of his capacities, are an inimitable method for getting up an artificial self-esteem. Except, however, by reference to a transcendental and preter-human standard, the lives of most people cannot be fairly described as failures. Nobody makes the very best imaginable use of original faculties and external opportunities, it is true; but then only a few make that worst use of them which stamps their existence as something like a mistake from beginning to end.

Although in theory everybody would admit that the worth of a man depends upon the personal qualities which he possesses and the use to which he has put them, and although, in the second place, everybody admits that his account must be made with his own life, and not with that of his neighbour, yet people are constantly disposed not only to lay more heavily upon their neighbour any burden which may be on his back through no fault of his own, but also to take to themselves whatever advantage they can get from his tribulation. Even while declaiming most vehemently, and as they believe most sincerely, against the injustice of such

conduct, men who are not on the alert for any lapse from a high-minded generosity insensibly get a trick of pluming themselves that they have this or that petty point of social superiority over another. That the disadvantage is in truth no fault of the other, and the freedom from it no credit to themselves, are two facts which they affect to recognize, but which are, nevertheless, silently passed over and hidden away when it is convenient, or when a mean humour has a temporary mastery. There is a difference between being proud of an adventitious quality, such as high birth, for instance, on the one hand, and falling back upon it, on the other, to support your own good opinion of yourself, as compared with somebody else who has no ancestors to speak of. So if a man has a fortune he has a right to be very pleased with his good luck, and enjoy to the full all the advantages which it places within his reach. But this kind of natural complacency is different from an inclination to turn to his fine house and horses and carriages and cooks, when he wants to think himself better than his friend who has his own way to make, and is making it.

That is to say, advantages which come to a man from no merit or achievement of his own may give him much and perfectly legitimate pleasure. An envious fool, whom spleen has driven to take refuge in impracticable first principles, may say that he



ought to insist on divesting himself of these unearned goods, and starting fair in the world. Sensible folks would rightly think ill of any one who thus deliberately chose to waste force, without acquiring any gain. But this enjoyment of advantages of birth or rank or wealth for themselves, is one thing. To bring oneself to look upon them as being just as much merits as if they meant industry and ability and perseverance, is another. The first is blameless; the second is hateful or contemptible.

But the rich and the well-born are not the only classes who are exposed to this temptation, or who give way to it either. The men who, by virtue of their good qualities, are pushing their fortunes in society are just as eager to seize and make the most of any adventitious bit of superiority over men who have the same good qualities as themselves, and who are pressing forward in the same race. We see this temper in the very earliest stage of the race. If, of two clever lads, one beats the other in writing elegiacs, or carries off the class prize, it is an unspeakable comfort to the defeated competitor to be able to stigmatize his rival ignominiously as a day-boy, or to think of him in the recesses of his own mind as the son of a shoemaker or a tailor. At college, the ambitious man who only gets a second is apt to congratulate himself very timidly and secretly, and as it were unconsciously, that his rival, who has got a first, has un-



couth manners and wears horridly-made clothes, and talks with a brogue. He knows he ought to be ashamed of himself, and, unless he is *all* pettiness, he is ashamed, though the brogue and the bad clothes may never become positively disagreeable to him. In youth this is less unpardonable than in grown-up people. The crowning social virtue is Magnanimity, which, among other characteristics, includes a capacity of taking a generous view of adversaries and competitors. Anybody who has reached five-and-twenty without acquiring a habit of vigorously striving to attain this tranquil breadth of mind, is in a fair way to become a very miserable self-tormentor. Perhaps he may not have time to indulge largely in the repeated comparison of himself with his neighbours, but at all events he loses that invaluable equanimity which belongs to a thoroughly generous spirit.

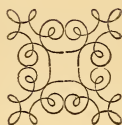
Ever so little social intercourse reveals to us the existence of plenty of men who are capable of this reflection, that somebody is running them very close in the race for fame or fortune, but, at all events, nobody knows who on earth his father was or where he has come from. The pitifulness of trying to get a notion of superiority out of such a circumstance as this never strikes them. They do not think what unutterable pettiness of soul is implied in laying hold, for purposes of self-congratulation, of the fact that one was born before his

father and mother were married, and another lives on a fortune acquired by a paternal rag and bone merchant, and a third has had no chance of acquiring refined manners. No doubt it is a pity not to be born in lawful wedlock and not to be the eldest son of a duke; but as either mishap is certainly not the fault of the man himself, while the fact of having escaped the mishap is as certainly no credit to others, what can be feebler than even to think of such things when we are, in an injudicious moment, trying to compare moral and intellectual heights with him? If my friend has the undisputed advantage over me in every other respect—in assiduity and vigour and kindness of temper and self-denial—and I can only throw myself on the marriage-register or an independent income in order to recover my own self-approval and comfortable complacency, then it is an extremely sorry and despicable thing to cultivate self-complacency in this way.

There is another kind of unfair advantage, and one still more commonly made the very most of by people of thin and ungenerous blood. Many men break down in some particular part of the course. Difficult places, which others do not find at all insurmountable, somehow trip them up and send them sprawling. Misconduct or folly may thus maim a man, and make him always go rather halt in the eyes of his fellows. One cannot blame so-

ciety for always being more or less on its guard against women who have once been unchaste, or men who have once shown themselves capable of a dishonest or dishonourable act. But this is quite different from a readiness to throw the past fault of man or woman into their faces when they are pursuing honest and approved courses. Everybody sees that this is a sign of a vulgar and uncontrolled temper, when two viragos in a low court ransack one another's private history to find foul names in their infuriated controversy. But, in higher life, the shabbiness of running over in the mind all a friend's past faults and weaknesses, so that we may think well of ourselves who have not sinned in his direction, is not always so clearly recognized. We do not call him by bad names; but still, in an indirect manner, we may think that our eye is good because his has been evil. The argument is amazingly indirect, it is true, but it is familiar enough to anybody who has ever pondered over the many shifts and subtleties by which men cajole themselves into self-satisfaction. They are so eager to reach this end as not to be, in ordinary cases, too scrupulous about the means. The satisfaction of generosity and manliness, which scorns to measure oneself by the mishaps or weak points of less fortunate friends, is a great deal finer than the satisfaction of a paltry complacency; but the road to the former is more difficult. To tread it firmly, a man

must have both a certain large and lofty capacity, and perpetual vigilance against the petty inclinations which are wont to beset even the strongest minds.





#### XIV.

### DIPLOMACY IN PRIVATE LIFE.



THE line between tact and artifice, between discretion and craftiness, is one that is not always easy to define. Everybody agrees that an artful nature is the meanest and most unmanly of all human dispositions, just as everybody allows that a person of tact is sure to get on in the world, and that he deserves the success which he has honestly earned. Those who are habitually sour and peevish, or who denounce as dishonest and insincere everything but blunt, rude, naked truth, may perhaps maintain that tact and artfulness are one and the same thing, only in the former case with its ugliness concealed under a pleasant name. Just as in the political world there are certain persons who insist that diplomacy is only the art of spinning cobwebs, which may give employment to highly-paid spiders

and catch the sillier sort of flies, but which a plain man immediately demolishes with the single flourish of a broom, so in ordinary social life it is the humour of a certain class to disparage anything like a roundabout way of approaching a desired position. They sneer at tact as a Manchester Radical sneers at notes and protocols and ultimatums and wranglings about precedence at Court. If you want a thing, ask for it. If you have anything to say, declare it. If you hold an opinion about anybody, be sure to let him or her know it. Life conducted on these principles would not be exactly a bed of roses, and the man who attempted it would deserve the fate which befell that cavilling demigod who would have it that men, to be perfectly organized for society, ought to have windows in their breasts, through which all their neighbours might see their inmost designs. The reputation of being a keen satirist may be very cheaply earned by any novelist who chooses to supply his characters with those windows which Momus desired, while at the same time he takes the precaution of depriving them all of the power of seeing through the windows of their neighbours. He and the reader have a kind of divine gift for the time being, and enjoy complacent chucklings together over the blunderings and blindness of the amiable fools who do not perceive the evil schemes on which the people around them are intent.



There are thus two views ;—one, that everybody ought ostentatiously to insist upon undergoing a constant inspection of all his intentions and motives ; and the other, that it is very well for the general peace of mankind that no such inspection is possible, because all men and women are busily engaged in little diplomatic plots and manœuvres for the success of which secrecy is quite essential. As usual, there is some truth in each of the conflicting notions. People very often take needless pains to cover up their plans and their motives, exactly as diplomatists do ; when it would be much better both for themselves and for others, and would much simplify life, if they went to work frankly and openly. And, on the other hand, it is evident enough that most of us at one time or another indulge in designs which it would be inconvenient or even fatal to disclose, and which, therefore, are judiciously covered with the cloak of diplomatic reserve, or, at all events, are only gradually unfolded with all due diplomatic formality. Nearly everybody feels, under certain circumstances, that the art of dexterously fencing with friends and enemies alike has its value. One does not at every juncture feel a call either to clasp a friend to one's bosom, or to run an enemy through the body and leave him dead on the ground. To be able to keep a neat guard against the affectionate but unseasonable importunities of

the one, as well as against the ill-natured assaults of the other, is a gift which is frequently of the highest value even to the most guileless and least deceitful of men. The forms of social diplomacy, then, have their uses in every sort of intercourse, whether with friends, with enemies, or with that huge majority who can only be classed as neutrals. In other words, in every social relation it is good to observe a measure of reserve, and not too hastily to discard stately usages, because they may be called pompous, and a decent ceremoniousness, because it appears hollow and meaningless.

A cynic, or a boisterous lover of what he barbarously styles naturalism, may exclaim against the folly of a number of elderly gentlemen sitting round a table with the object of settling great questions, and each of them doing his best to conceal the true aim which is at his heart under a cloud of courteous and long-winded forms. This, says the one, is a fine illustration on a large scale, and with very conspicuous actors, of the irony of life. You are all going through the world saying one thing and meaning another, hiding hatreds under seemly phrases, gilding a profound indifference with the graceful pretences of friendship, and each one steadily pursuing his particular selfish aim on affected principles of justice and honour. After all, if we concede to our pleasant interlocutor that all mankind are thus knavish and hypocritical,

an admirable case might still be made out for the recourse to forms and ceremonies which hide anything so repulsive and ugly as this state of feeling. But the position is scarcely worth disputing. It would be a cruelty to rob anybody who occupies it of the heartfelt solace which it must give him in all his dealings with his kind. He at least knows that he is never taken in by the demonstrations of kindness and good-will and self-denial pretentiously made by his rascally neighbours. The idea that form is only another way of writing fraud, and that everybody who is not blunt and rude is insincere, is so truly gratifying, that no one who has suffered himself to be lapped in such a delusion would thank one for awaking him.

But people who do not yield to this overdone nonsense about the irony of life very often have a modified notion that it is not quite right to practise those little *ménagements* which consist in keeping back this, and bringing into a rather stronger light that, and putting a touch of artificial colour into the other. They are prone to conceive that decoration and contrivance turn life into something too like a stage-play. Existence is, they say, too serious a matter for people to put rouge on their cheeks, and wear theatrical periwigs, and discourse in sesquipedalian talk. This, however, is to overlook the true difference between a play-actor and a diplomatist. The latter does not pre-

tend to be somebody else, other than the person he really is. He only keeps back a part of his mind or intention. Civilized nations find many advantages in covering up the greater part of the human frame, but they are not on that account abused for being theatrical and artificial; nor is it usual to assume that clothing is a device resorted to in order to conceal physical deformities. Surely it is as unjust to suspect every man who does not wear his heart upon his sleeve of being a crafty villain.

The marks of a good diplomatist have been held to include an agreeable address, an art of winning confidence, the knack of catching the tone of any given society. In the transactions of private life all these qualities seem to be summed up in the word "tact." It has been observed by a great historian that diplomatists, as a class, have not been distinguished for "generous enthusiasm or austere rectitude." And among social diplomatists equally, perhaps, one might observe the same absence of these distinctions. But then not only among professional diplomatists, but among the whole run of mankind, the virtues of generous enthusiasm and austere rectitude are exceptional, and not universal, characteristics. Are haberdashers or lawyers or parsons or tailors conspicuous, as classes, for their generous enthusiasm and austere rectitude? This is only an illustration of a very common tendency to snub the minor virtues sim-

ply because they are not the greatest, or do not drag the greatest in their train. A vulgar mind refuses to believe that these skilful diplomatists, the men of tact and popularity, who play their cards well, are sincere, and is glad to think they are devoid of the sublimer sort of good qualities, on exactly the same principle as that which makes him incredulous that a man of vivacious manner and keen interests in a multitude of things can be a good scholar or a person of erudition. If a man is only a morose and scowling pedant, people of this stamp are willing to believe anything you like to tell them of his profound attainments.

It is a great comfort to be thus able to fall heavily upon a little virtue by talking of a very big one. The possession of pleasant diplomatic manners and the knack of being all things to all men, of course within honest bounds, can be made to appear very small affairs indeed if you begin to measure the possessor by the standard of Joan of Arc or Socrates; and, in doing this very thing, you have raised yourself to a great height in the diplomatic art, but on its meanest and ugliest side. The truth is, the grander virtues are only available on grand occasions. One cannot be generously enthusiastic every day of one's life. Neither does every imaginable position or every possible topic give room for an exhibition of austere rectitude. But there is no part or detail of a man's conduct which is



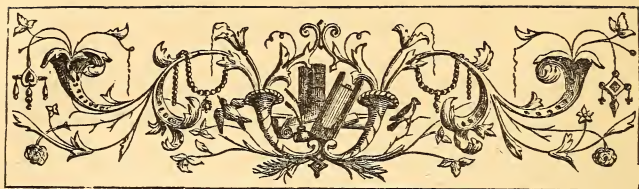
not affected by his view of the use and lawfulness of social diplomacy, which, after all, is only another name for the discreet and successful management of his everyday relations with the world. "If," to borrow the language of Sir Thomas More, "when one of Plautus's comedies is on the stage, and a company of servants are acting their parts, you should come out in the garb of a philosopher, and repeat out of *Octavia* a discourse of Seneca's to Nero, had it not been better for you to have said nothing than, by mixing things of such different nature, to have made such an impertinent tragi-comedy?" Put in this way, there is not much doubt as to the answer which even the most blind and unintelligent of men would return. It certainly would be better to have said nothing.

But those who are all against diplomatic fencing, and diplomatic address and tact, would of course object very strenuously to all comparison of life with a comedy. We ought to be clad in the garb of philosophers, and to repeat only philosophic discourses. The only reply to this is, that we are not all strung up to the high philosophic pitch. Horace Walpole said that life, though a tragedy to those who feel, is a comedy to those who think. This is true at least of the ordinary superficial intercourse of man. It is preposterous to growl and grumble because they seem to be playing at cross-purposes with one another, and getting themselves



into all sorts of fixes and scrapes, and making a way out of them by clever tricks and crafty devices which do not quite square with the very sublimest first principles. We may wish very sincerely that people would desist from getting into fixes in their relations with others. It would be ever so much better for them, ever so much better for the world too, if they followed steady philosophic precepts. Only, as they do not, we must take them and the world as we find them.

Women are universally admitted to be the adroitest masters of the diplomatic art. They play the part in the comedy of modern life which was allotted in the drama of less civilized ages to Davus and to Syrus, and they play it much better. The heroine of 'Vanity Fair' is more entertaining than Davus or Syrus, because she works naturally and easily, and without resorting to the coarse expedients of lying, or stealing, or worse. All is effected by real finesse; and, above everything, women are perfect in what has been justly called the most subtle of all forms of finesse—"de savoir bien feindre de tomber dans les pièges qu'on nous tend." The skill of the diplomatist can go no further than this. Whether it is artifice or tact is one of those nice questions which it is perhaps not consistent with the rules of gallantry to examine too closely.



## XV.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOUR GRAPES.

“**T**HERE is nothing better or loftier,” Cicero declared, “than to despise wealth if you do not possess it.” The more modern philosopher would tell us that it is a great deal better and loftier to despise wealth if you do possess it. Hume, for example, was much more candid and better worth listening to when he confessed that, though in melancholy moments he consoled himself by “peevish reflections on the vanity of the world and all human glory,” still he had found that such sentiments can never be sincere except in those who possess what they protest that they despise. Some popular sentiment is still perhaps on Cicero’s side. If people have not got what is commonly held a desirable thing, such as riches or reputation or position, they may easily get into a way of thinking all the better

of themselves for being without what the vulgar herd of their neighbours value so highly. And their neighbours are not seldom taken in by this affectation of a genuine contentment with humble fortunes. The world at large is mostly too busy to take much pains accurately to gauge any one man's pretensions to be a philosopher, or to test very closely the sincerity of any philosophic creed which he chooses to profess. If he avows that he would as lief live in a tub as in a palace, and avows it often enough and vehemently enough, and if he is never detected in any assiduous effort to get into a more stylish and more commodious tub, people take him at his word, and believe that here is one man at least who has seen through the vanities of life. It might occur to a Machiavellian mind that there is a touch of policy in the encouragement we give to folk who despise riches and glory. Those who are shortening their days in the headlong chase after the world's prizes are not sorry—so it may seem to the Machiavellian mind—to watch competitors drop aside, vowing that the prizes are not worth the trouble of winning. We feign to agree with them, and pretend that they almost persuade us to be philosophers, and then we push on more ardently than ever. But selfish craft of this sort is not enough to explain the reverence with which ordinary persons are ready to regard almost anybody who gives himself the air of look-

ing down upon what other people like and pursue. Though in one sense the world hates any dissent from prevalent usage, yet in another it is willing to tolerate or even adore any dissident whose eccentricity only takes a passive or negative form. Provided he does not actively fly in the faces of his neighbours, or want them to do something which they have not been accustomed and are not inclined to do, then he may amuse himself by despising them as bitterly as he chooses. The world in the abstract rather likes being despised. No novelist or preacher is so popular as one who never tires of telling us what baubles and gewgaws we all spend our butterfly lives in chasing. Reflections about gewgaws breed a sort of reckless reaction. A man who is too deeply convinced that life is all vanity, and that he is only an ephemeral insect fluttering in the light of the sun until the evening, soon begins to feel rather hilarious on the strength of this theory, and resolves at all events to gather rosebuds while he may. The more you preach to him that life is a bubble, the less reason does he discover for not making things as lively as he can.

In spite of the respect that too simple persons are in the habit of paying to stoical professions of contempt for ordinary aims and pursuits, such professions are nearly always as artificial as they were in Cicero's own case. Contempt for money,

for instance, is constantly found to be only a fine name for being too indolent to earn it, or too extravagant to keep it. There are plenty of people, happily, who know that there are many of the highest goods in life which the possession of money is utterly powerless to secure. But this is very different from the folly of ignoring that there are some of the highest goods in life which can be secured by nothing but money. It is quite true that the anguish of bereavement or the miseries of ill health cannot be allayed by ever so much wealth. But, on the other hand, it is just as true that poverty is very apt to be fatal to independence, and that it is certainly fatal to most of those graces and dignities which are not indispensable to virtue, but are indispensable for making the most of character. To despise money "if you have not got it," and to abstain in consequence from trying to get any, is to despise a great number of admitted good things, and to despise the power of imparting any of these admitted good things to other people. If you have tasted the grapes and spat them out again, people may believe your assertion that they are sour. Otherwise they would be justified in thinking more commonly than they do that such assertions are the mark of a fool, not of a philosopher.

And it is just the same with all the other objects which the affected Stoic pretends to condemn. The



bubble reputation, whether sought at the cannon's mouth, or at the mouth of the inkpot, or out of one's own mouth, does not guarantee the successful soldier or writer or orator absolute ease of mind. The more famous he grows, the more vigorously he will be bullied and snubbed. But to pretend to think little of fame is to think little of a motive which has produced the greatest and most beneficent achievements that have made the globe as decently inhabitable as it is. It is all very well for irresolute Hamlets to grow melancholy over the fate of imperial Cæsar, stopping a hole to keep the wind away, and for truculent Juvenals to laugh grimly over the great orator supplying a subject for school recitations. And fame is a very perishable, and most likely not a very comfortable, thing. Only, if wise men all became philosophers, and determined to content themselves with listless irresolution or with truculence, and to leave fame for fools, it is obvious that the stock of happiness in the world would soon suffer a grave diminution.

Paradoxical as it may seem, there is good reason for believing that the spread of the sour-grape philosophy, among young men especially, has been in some measure a result of the greater accessibility of grapes in our time. When so many of the prizes of life were out of the reach of the majority, and were only to be gained by members of exclusive sets, the outsiders could afford to admit that they



were prizes, and that they were worth having. But the advance of the democratic spirit has thrown every post, from Irish constable to Prime Minister, more or less open. The old barriers are being broken down. When a man sees Mr. Disraeli leading one party, and Mr. Gladstone the other, he cannot say that either ancient birth or unbounded wealth is absolutely essential to public success. And so in other careers. If a man has brains and health and a decently early start in the world, there is no external clog to prevent him from rising as high as he likes. There is nothing in the constitution of society to hinder an educated man from getting whatever praise or pudding his own qualities and conduct entitle him to. But then it is not everybody who cares to subject his powers to that exercise, and his conduct to that discipline, which are among the conditions of success. In older times a man indisposed to exertion and self-denial might excuse himself by thinking that, if he tried ever so hard, he would still be excluded from his reward by the evil system on which prizes were distributed. Lazy and self-indulgent men can no longer throw themselves on this happy pretext. It is their own fault if they do not make any mark they are capable of making. So they are constrained to take up with a new doctrine; and the one which best suits their conceit and their indolence at the same time is to maintain that

there is no good in making marks. The cotton-spinner who toils to make money, the barrister who toils in order to sit on the bench or the wool-sack, the writer who toils either to enforce his ideas or to win fame or to do both, are all alike pitied as men burning their candles for a stake which is not worth such an outlay. The grapes, though more accessible in one respect, are even more inaccessible than ever to those who would like them, but are not prepared to pay the price in labour and perseverance and self-denial.

To measure how intensely artificial and insincere is this theory of the worthlessness of what most people think desirable things, it is only necessary to look at the aims which it is proposed to substitute in their place. It is a pitiful thing, one may admit, that a man should devote his life to arranging taxes for the British public, or to drawing bills and petitions and answers and pleadings and demurrers, or to writing learned books which only a few hundred people ever care for, or even hear about. We can quite imagine an order of beings to whom an existence of any of these kinds would be utterly mean and intolerable. There may be celestials who are justified in looking with pity and contempt upon a mortal who wears his mental faculties out in order to be able to sit on an uncomfortable red sofa in the House of Lords, and to preside over a few other mortals most of

whom had only very scanty mental faculties to wear out. It is possible that in another sphere a man puzzling himself why apples fall, and why the planets keep in their places, presents but a poor spectacle, and we may then "show a Newton as we show an ape." But meanwhile one must measure things by such standards as there are. To estimate the worth of the objects which vulgar mortals pass their lives in seeking, it is well to consider how much better and nobler and loftier an existence is led by the philosophers who insist that all the grapes that we can gather on our system are sour and tasteless. If vulgar motives of ambition lead a man so short a way on the path to happiness and a worthy life, how much better off is the man who sees through all the vulgar moonshine, and knows there is nothing in it? How much better off is the man who, not having money, despises it, and who, not having earned any distinction or reputation, thinks himself quite as fortunate and as admirable without it? One finds oneself in the world with a certain stock of faculties and opportunities, and one must do something with them—to pass the time, say, if nothing else. If a man is not making money, or making discoveries, or writing books, or leading the House of Commons—all poor work enough for angels and seraphs, we dare say,—he must still be doing something or other. What do our modern epicureans suggest?

As might be expected, their answers to this fundamental question are very various. Like all other sects, they are split up into an infinite number of subdivisions. But their great common and distinctive principle is *dawdling*. This is the keystone of their system, the ground on which they all meet, and from which all their ramifications of detail may be traced. Some prefer one form of dawdling, while others like another form. The more respectable of them are fond of books, and lounge through life in an easy chair, reading; but to take the trouble to digest what they read, to get out of it a coherent set of ideas and principles, so as to enable them to cut a better figure in the world or to have something to impart to the world, would be to fall in with the stupid and vulgar prejudices on the subject. A man with an active interest in ideas, and who works hard to enforce them, is the victim of a common delusion. What has the world done for him, or what will it do, that he should worry himself about ideas for it? Occasionally, this easy lounging through books is accompanied by a taste for music and painting, and the man with all this finds existence very tolerable. Others are content to spend their time in travelling, and picking up little odds and ends of notions about the manners and customs and politics of Continental countries. A third set go in for pleasure, pure and simple, without a pretence of pick-

ing up odds and ends of notions about anything. It would be absurd to use hard names about these and the other varieties of the philosophical loafer. They like their own mode of life, and it is in the main an elegant way of passing the time, though one cannot help thinking that forty or fifty years of it must contain a few uncommonly dull moments. We cannot blame the fox for being a fox, and we need not deny that there is room for elegant loafers in the economy of nature. But there can be no injustice in protesting that all grapes are not sour because they are out of the fox's reach, and that the world's prizes are not all utterly worthless and unsatisfactory because the loafer does not care to go through the hard work that is necessary in order to get them. True, a great professional reputation, or a good position in Parliament, or the fame of having written a good book, is vanity and vexation of spirit; but is not dawdling, with ever so fine a name given to it, vanity and vexation of spirit equally? The results of hard work may prove to be a bubble, only this does not show that laziness and mental inactivity and a careful repression of enthusiasm for things which the rest of the world is interested in are anything better than the bubble, after all.

Horace Walpole was a splendid example of the creature who, in Macaulay's words, "thinks fit to



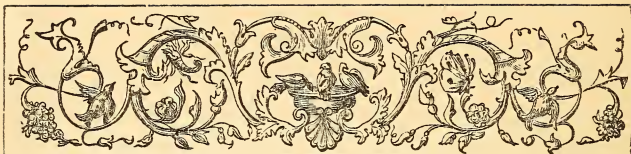
dignify with the name of philosophy his busy idleness, his indifference to matters which the world generally regards as important, his passion for trifles." "It was owing to the particular elevation of his character that he cared about a pinnacle of lath and plaster more than about the Middlesex Election, and about a miniature of Grammont than about the American Revolution." The pretended equanimity with which some persons talk about public affairs now is just as sheer and vile an affectation in them as it was in Horace Walpole.

A measure for reforming the representation or reducing the National Debt, or a vote of want of confidence in a Ministry, may be very trifling affairs if we look down the long vista of human history; but still they are better worth seriously thinking about for half a day than the question whether the Club cook was as successful in the white sauce last night as he had been two nights before, or whether the claret at eight-and-sixpence is worth the difference in price over the claret at seven-and-sixpence. Politics may be vanity, but then so is white sauce; and if you come to measure vanities, perhaps the white sauce is the vainer and more fleeting of the two. There are few prevalent hypocrisies so utterly despicable as that which allows a man, because he cares for his dinner or his books or his own personal comfort, and does not care for large public interests, to assume



the airs of the even-minded philosopher. Let him be as lazy and as selfish as he chooses, but it is too intolerable to hear him impudently declaring that the objects which make other men refuse to be lazy and selfish are all hollow and insipid.





## XVI.

### INTELLECTUAL VIGOUR.



IT is no new remark that, among intellectual as among moral virtues, there is a constant tendency to allow the cultivation of one good quality to edge out another or a set of other good qualities. But, though not new, this is a truth much more commonly lost sight of in connection with intellect than it is in reference to conduct, and for a reason which may be pretty easily discovered. If a man sacrifices one virtue in conduct for the sake of another, instead of maintaining a just balance between them, the consequence is so plainly visible, both to himself and his neighbours, that he is speedily pulled up; or, if he chooses to persevere with his one-sided virtue, at least he does so deliberately and with preference. The consequences of purely intellectual habits are subtler, and less on

the surface. Even reflecting men may fall into very vicious intellectual states, and remain in them perhaps for a whole lifetime, without ever finding out how much injury they have suffered from encouraging an excess of one good quality and permitting a defect of another. The comparative secrecy and invisibleness of the growth of intellectual habits makes it so much the more difficult to preserve the proper balance among them. While we cultivate an assiduous attention to accuracy and completeness of detail, we may be losing the faculty for grouping details under principles; and, on the other hand, an unguarded passion for general principles is always ready to betray us into a flashy misinterpretation of particular circumstances. The development of imagination and of a love of beauty constantly overruns the capacity of appreciating or valuing scientific truth, just as exclusive attention to the scientific side of things, if unwatched, tends to deaden all sensibility to the poetic side. There is a host of other contending virtues of this kind, each of which is ready to elbow out its contradictory, or rather its complementary, virtue. The injury which comes of allowing either to gain a definite victory over the other may be seen in the history of nearly every subject which has engaged the human mind. The comparatively slow progress made in history proper is due chiefly to the repugnance entertained

by the men of detail to generalizing their facts, and by the men of generalization to accurate and wide verification of their principles. The feebleness and windiness of bad poets is commonly to be traced to their reluctance to prop up their minds on the side of facts and observation and learning. On the other hand, even the most pedantic followers of physical science now admit that some of the most brilliant discoveries would never have been made if the discoverers had not been guided by the light of a poetic, half-fastastic imagination.

But there is a special complaint, in our own time, that the culture of the admirable group of intellectual virtues which may be comprehended in the name of tolerance, or impartiality, or sympathy, is being allowed to drain off the sources of the no less admirable virtue of conviction or earnestness. What men gain in many-sidedness, it is said, they are losing in vigour. They are so anxious to do justice to the ideas of everybody else that they have no strength left, or inclination either, to grasp and hold a set of ideas for themselves. That this is a natural tendency of the philosophic doctrine of toleration in the case of very weak or very rash minds is pretty certain. But then the people would have been worse but for this doctrine, because the weakest and rashest sympathy with every possible opinion all round is

not so bad as a similarly weak and rash intolerance. Considering the strong probability there is in favour of the opinions which a man holds intolerantly being wrong and false opinions, it is better that he should veer about among a variety of views than that he should only be able to stick to one on condition of hating and despising all others, past, present, or to come. It is a great pity that so many people should insist upon being weak; but, so long as weak minds continue to appear in the world, it is better that their weakness should take the form of being sure about nothing than the form of being positively sure of only one thing—namely, that everybody who does not think exactly as they think must certainly be wrong. If assured conviction is only to be purchased at this price most people would agree that it is too dear.

But the assailants of the prevailing temper of the day insist that it is not only the feeble but the stern characters, too, who have had their capacity for true and vigorous thinking impaired and enervated. It is not only the whimsical fools that think everything by turns and nothing long. On the contrary, men whose intelligence and sincerity and industry in the search for truth you would otherwise rate at the very highest, are as fatally paralysed as their less elevated neighbours, by the doctrine that there must be some germ of truth in everything that can be said or thought. There

is something to be urged in support of this very uncomfortable theory about us all, but, before seeing how much it amounts to, it may be worth while to look at one or two considerations which go some way both to account for and to overthrow the theory.

First of all, a great many persons confound the doctrine that there is some truth in everything with the doctrine that there is no truth in anything. It has been very convenient for superficial people who are too careless and too little elevated in character to take the trouble to have any convictions, to pretend that the latter proposition is a corollary from the former. It is not the first time by many that a philosophic doctrine has been distorted into a pretext for indolence. When half-hearted people get tired of hunting after truth all over the world of opinion, of balancing and discriminating and modifying, it is a great relief to be able to give it all up with a conviction that there is nothing in it, and that, except for purposes of argument and light social disputation, you may just as well take one side as another, because there is no substantial truth in either. Free and easy Pyrrhonism of this sort is not the product of any eclectic theory about truth, but simply the form accidentally imposed on commonplace selfishness and apathy.

Secondly, people are apt to conclude that we



are not so much in earnest now as men used to be, because those who differ from one another do not employ so much scorching and scathing bad language. The modern controversialist does not, as Warburton did habitually, accuse his opponent of vile prevarication, of monstrous and shameless lying, of wallowing in the slime of misrepresentation and falsehood, nor does he speak or even think of him as a "scrub," a "rogue," a "beggarly impostor." Nobody with any self-respect would now permit himself to say even of the most audacious thinker, as Johnson roared out of Hume, "that he had just enough light to light him to hell." Even bishops are forced, by the public opinion of the age, to put the matter rather more delicately than this. Byron called Southey "an arrogant scribbler of all work," and Southey spoke of the Edinburgh Reviewer as having "stripped bare his pitiful malevolence, and exhibited it in his bald, wicked, and undisguised deformity." We have, it is true, recently witnessed a revival of this style in the outrageous and thoroughly discreditable violence of the clamour against an unpopular politician. But the disrepute into which such violence brought the writers and orators who resorted to it is a sign how much milder we are become. It is rather hard to argue that a philosopher is wanting in vigour because he tranquilly takes his adversary's reasoning to pieces and shows how

little it is worth, instead of railing at him and calling him a scrub and a rogue and a vile prevaricator, and vowing that he has just got cleverness enough to find the quickest way to hell. The fallacy, however, of inferring depth of conviction from violent and heated language scarcely needs examining. Only there are people who seriously think that we are less earnest than our fathers because we do not grow so bitter and ferocious over our disputes, just as there are others who consider the preference of claret to "comet" port, mostly so styled from its fiery and destructive properties, a clear symptom of national degeneracy.

A third mistake, which is rather less obvious than this, is to infer a decay of intellectual vigour from the fact that men are beginning, not only to have less decided opinions on any subject, but to admit that there are fewer subjects on which they have any opinions at all. It is true that there are more gaps in the circle of an ordinarily educated man's knowledge than there used to be. There are whole sciences of which he cannot choose but remain in ignorance. One mind is no longer able to keep pace with the advance of all minds. When there was only little to be learnt, a man might know something of every subject. But the circle of subjects is being indefinitely widened every day, as well as each subject pushed indefinitely further than was possible with the old

methods and apparatus of reasoning. It is the vast increase of intellectual vigour and strength, not its decay, which makes it impossible for any one man to possess so many sets of opinions as he might have done when the list of the objects of intellectual interest and inquiry was so very much shorter.

Yet for all this, in spite of much that is unreasonable in the talk about our own times, it may be confessed that there is a sense in which we may be said to be wanting in robustness of thought; and if the charge is only not exaggerated, and if we are only not asked to revert to some dead and buried modes of thought, instead of developing modes with new vitality in them, nothing can be better worth thinking about. The worst of confessing that the spirit of the age has its faults is that, the very moment you have made the confession, you are seized violently by a zealot at either arm, the one insisting on dragging you back to the ideas which were good enough for departed grandfathers and therefore are surely good enough for you, the other pulling you forward to an instantaneous and unimpeachable millennium which you have no more desire to attain than a bad little boy has to go to heaven. The sense in which thinkers and writers may perhaps be held to be less robust than is desirable gives no countenance to the notion that a recurrence to obsolete ideas of theology, politics, or education would make

things any better. Whatever remedy may be found effective will rather be the modification of one set of new ideas by another than any revival of expired fashions of mental culture. But a certain lack of direct momentum exists in modern opinion. The vacillations, for example, in the minds of some of the best-educated men on the subject of democratic government, and the flux and reflux of the same man's opinions as to the province of reason in religious inquiry, are two illustrations in the largest fields of the fact that, in the most highly-trained minds, opinion is like some abnormal pendulum perpetually oscillating to precisely the same distances on either side of the line, and never approximating any nearer to a state of rest midway. Perhaps a more fitting simile would be that of a bird hopping abruptly from twig to twig. Alternate disgusts with the conduct of the uneducated crowd and with the theory of an oligarchic government, with the excessive pretensions of authority and the excessive pretensions of pure reason, distract the mind, and send the wretched victim from one pole to the other with ceaseless activity. Convictions seem in such cases to be destitute of that momentum without which they are worth little, and which would make men eager to seize any opportunity of enforcing them. But this unfruitful timidity is probably the effect of another cause besides the extreme willingness to

see some good in every side. It may spring just as often from an extreme conscientiousness. Anybody who does not much care whether what he believes is the truth or not may very soon reach an edifying strength of conviction. But men who have taught themselves that the truth of a belief is the most important thing about it are naturally less ready to pick up an opinion anyhow, and then to stick to it as if they had come by it in the most legitimate way in the world. The over-conscientious lose their nerve and firmness for the same reason that the surgeon was in danger of losing his nerve when he had to attend the wife of Napoleon. The consequences of making a blunder appear too overwhelming. Reverence of this sort for truth does as much harm to its object as the surgeon's reverence for majesty might have done to the Empress.

Another very common source of the deficient vigour of which people complain in much modern thought and literature is the assiduous attention which it is the fashion to pay to refinement of taste. A man cannot call his opponent a scrub now, even if he thinks him one; and if the curtailment of choice epithets of this kind were the only consequence, one would not deplore it. But a too fastidious refinement has had the more mischievous effect of checking that freshness which belongs to ideas that are presented to us straight

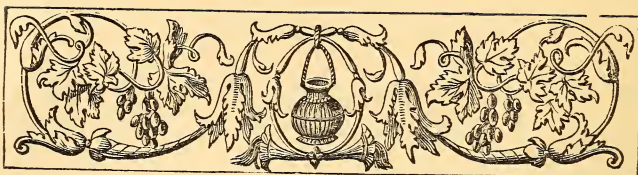


as they come from the soil. The too refined man is so anxious to dress his ideas in what may be called a company garb that he robs them of nearly all that is most characteristic and racy about them. Hence the just complaint about so much modern writing, that it has no backbone in it; leaving the order of vertebrates, it has sunk down to lower classes, among mere molluscs and jelly-fish and other flabby organizations. Authors with too much concern for polish are like wrestlers who should devote their minds to the cut of their clothes, and only give a fragment of attention to their thews and sinews. Even Macaulay's style is considered too rude and downright by some who think that a poor idea delicately expressed is a more admirable thing than a pregnant idea just roughly thrown out as it sprang up in the mind. Overdone verse-writing in early youth may have something to do with this squeamishness, which makes an elegant outside the chief thing, and the soundness and substance of the kernel only secondary. Still it would be rash to assume that all that is given to taste is so much taken away from that capacity of straightforward and robust judgment in the world of ideas which is one of the most excellent of intellectual qualities. To lose hold of vigorous habits of thought in the pursuit either of some ideal goddess of truth or of a finicking tastefulness, is to impair the balance of



character in a most fatal way. Vigour is perhaps the least to be dispensed with of all those virtues of understanding which, along with certain virtues of the heart, constitute that wisdom which is the perfect and full flower of human character. This is so, because conduct, which is the ultimate test of the worth of all thinking, is sure to become weak and wavering in proportion to the falling-off of this internal vigour.





## XVII.

### MENTAL RIPENESS.

**T** is a matter of very common observation that men are wont to give up their game of life too easily, or, to put it in another way, to lower their aims and choose the less worthy prizes after an insufficient essay to reach the higher objects which at first, and justly, they thought best worth having. They are too willing to think that their character has crystallized, that they have somehow found their way into a groove which their age and circumstances forbid them to exchange for another. In this sense men are always inclined to fancy themselves older than they are, and every year is, not without a certain feeling of relief, made to count for two. A man of five-and-thirty, looking at the chances of his animal life, commonly takes a cheerful and expansive view of the future in that respect,

but if you discourse to him upon higher moral purpose, wider intellectual sympathies, new and varied pursuits, he replies as if the book of his life were instantly on the point of being sealed and made up. The opportunity of adding new pages he holds to be for ever vanished. Sighing, "*Ah, si jeunesse savait,*" he tacitly surrenders his earlier aspirations, content, as he says, to renew them in his children, or forced, as he thinks, by compulsion of circumstance, to bend his mind to the grosser but more urgent needs of daily life, and so to allow the old flame to go flickering out. Even upon uncultivated persons the conviction has a very evil influence, that it is too late to take any trouble about extending the mental outlook any time after the first days of youth. But it is among the comparatively few cultivated people that the mischief is greatest of supposing that one has got too far on in life, too firmly set in certain paths, to make any change, or to attempt new courses. Those whose aspirations would be most likely to run in a direction that would instruct and delight their fellows are just those whom indolence or diffidence constantly tempts to think themselves too old to make any deliberate effort to realize their dreams.

And friends not seldom fancy they are playing the friendliest part by pouring into a man's ear warnings that the cobbler should stick to his last, that by attempting too much he will do nothing, that what

might have been well if begun early cannot be other than ill when begun later, with a thousand other terse and specious forms of the doctrine—which may be good in matters of belief, but is certainly not good in matters of conduct—that you should never interfere with a quiet *status quo*. One would suppose that youth was not only the seed-time, but the chief season for harvest as well, and that, as far as ideas and hopes are concerned, there is no more growth, no further ripening and mellowing. We often discover this gross fallacy in talk about literature, and especially about the more imaginative kinds of literature.

The common theory among superficial persons appears to be that the mind gets a distinct set, or ply, or twist in youth, and that in this nature means it to stay. Choose your subject or your line, they say, as early as you can, and then let nothing divert you from its single pursuit; just for all the world as if expanding and enriching and proving one's mind were like keeping a retail shop, or making a fortune as a huckster. The gradual development of the tastes, the slow growth of those intellectual preferences which are sure to come in every character that has any original fertility and is wisely tended, are processes for which little allowance is made, either by the individual who is eager for the result, or by the world at large, which not unnaturally concerns itself with results only, and scarcely

at all with the silent ways and invisible means. This slow-climbing patience is particularly hard and unwelcome, because the necessity for it comes fresh upon men after the easy golden visions of youth. Inexperience serves to spread a luminous haze over the future, through which all seems bright and delightfully accessible, and then, when it is proved that they have concealed, not grassy slopes, but rocky and toilsome heights, patience becomes doubly and trebly hard to practise. The poet, in the prologue to 'Faust,' looks back with desire upon the time when he "was still forming," "when he had nothing and yet enough; the longing after truth and the pleasure in delusion." As the friendly Merryman reprovingly reminds him, youth is very well in dealing with foes, or "when the loveliest of lasses cling with ardour round your neck;" but "to strike the familiar lyre with spirit and grace, to sweep along with happy wanderings towards a self-appointed aim—such is the task your ripened age imposes."

Literature, like much else, suffers heavily at the present day from the excess of haste to reach certain ends. The modern theory of ripened age is that it is the time to sit down and enjoy the fruits that have been earned by the crude labours of immature years. The days of long schooling and sedulous preparation are for the present at an end, except in rare cases. Most of the poets of the



rising generation, for instance, and most of the novelists of the generation that is, are afraid of their imagination fading away before they have had time to make the most of it; or else they feel confident that, if they were to study history or philosophy, or anything else that demands close attention, they would be quenching their inventive faculty. The imagination, it seems, will only thrive amid the ruins of reason and judgment, and in the nourishing air of ignorance, which, elsewhere so pestilent, is here oddly enough supposed to be salubrious. Instead of being content with the ordinary laws of intellectual as of other kinds of growth—first the leaf, then the blossom, then the fruit,—these overhasty souls insist on bursting into full fruitage at their first impulse. Suppose they fail a little; suppose what they vow to be the richest and ripest the world finds only “berries harsh and crude,” then it is that the world falls into disgrace. The fault is with the world that so shamefully insists on knowing nothing of its greatest men, and not at all with the too ambitious creatures who insist on writing and painting things before they have had any time either to weigh the things that are best worth writing and painting, or to grasp the mastery of all the many ingredients that enter into good workmanship. Wiser than these, but still unwise, are those others who, though shrewd enough to perceive that patience and silence and long culture are



the invariable antecedents of the best work, too recklessly conclude that they do not possess the native capacity for patience, and that this is a capacity which a man with the cares of the world upon him cannot expect to acquire. Men judiciously think that a recognition of the difficulties which stand in the way of an achievement is the first condition of overcoming them. So it is, provided one does not recognize them with such graphic and striking force as to be disheartened from attempting the achievement altogether. A weak diffidence has done the world as much harm as a rash confidence, and these are the two points between which an unseasoned mind is apt to wander, doing nothing except hoping alternately too much and too little, feeling itself too great and too small.

The patience which ripens the mind and fits it for many interests and great compositions is no inactive waiting for something that will come of itself. Poetry is not, as has been humorously said, secreted in the duodenum. Passive stargazing, pleasant expectation of the divine afflatus, does not ensure any practical result; and a man may look hard into the fire, or up into the heavens, or keenly round on his kind, or wherever he seeks to woo his own particular Muse, without ever getting an idea or an image that is worth the trouble of describing or retaining. A state of slow but never-staying fermentation, in which every-

thing that enters the mind is transformed and assimilated, and which is constantly keeping the mind exercised in the search after new things,—this is the condition of those who have escaped an innate lethargy of soul, and who have not allowed the early growths of good seed to be choked by the tares of excessive worldly business. Not that total immunity from such business is by any means a desirable auxiliary to this ripening process. Some of the very best work in the sphere of ideas has been done by men habitually occupied in the sphere of affairs. But the pressure which chokes the finer out-shoots of character is that of the necessities of a dependent family, of a traditional kind of desire to make a great deal of money, of expensive habits which require much merely mercenary labour to pay for them. It is the excess of business carried on under severe pressure of this or any other external kind which is so fatal to a large and serene internal activity. For there is all the difference in the world, in point of fruitfulness, between this serene activity and a vain fussiness or feverish agitation. This is one reason among many why the earlier part of life is least favourable to all the choicest and highest sorts of artistic production. By serenity we do not mean necessarily happiness or comfort. A man may be serenely miserable, and perhaps this is the mood to which the world is indebted for some of those works which it would least willingly let die. But

sorrowful composure is altogether removed alike from the anguish which bites and stings, and from the small cares which vex and fret and worry. In the earlier years this kind of composure is almost impossible, except in the case of the born prig, whose emotions and passions were all formed and shaped and set in decent order, finally and once for all, before he came into a disorderly world. It is not till experience and observation have in a measure rubbed away from things their exciting newness that a man is able to ascend the heights of reflection, and view them all, not with indifference, but without any fiery perturbation or discomposure.

There is one quality which marks in common both a very ripe and a very unripe mind of a certain stamp,—a readiness, namely, to turn with elation to all sorts of subjects. But it requires no words to point out the difference between these two forms of versatility. It is not to be discouraged in any case, because a variety of interests, however thin and superficial they may be, is incalculably to be preferred to a lethargic loitering over one dull little bit of ground. Hence the folly of people who pride themselves on a prudence, too charitably so-called, which consists in tethering their interests to some one post, personal or professional, political or theological, and who demand with more or less force that everybody else with whom they think

they ought to have influence should confine himself within the same bounds.

But the man who has lived long enough, and long enough in the right way, to make himself vigorous on many sides, and agile in many situations, has not been affected by the considerations which weigh decisively with persons who lack the courage, and still more the patience, to let character ripen naturally, without excessive eagerness to force it too rapidly or too narrowly in a given direction, or to stop its growth at a given height. He feels that time and industry and the maintenance of a thoroughly open mind all round are sure to end well, and to give him that deep knowledge of his own strong places which is essential to anything like making the best of himself. If he had been impelled by the hurry of the age and by ill-advising counsellors to submit to a process of forcing, he could never have got this knowledge, and his life would have been by so much the more savourless. The consciousness, however, that some of the best work in every department is done by men who ripened late does not prevent him from sighing over the lapse of the years that intervene. Milton, who saw the good of not choosing a subject too soon and of beginning late, could wonder at three-and-twenty whether "some more timely-happy spirits" were riper than his own :—

“My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom sheweth.  
Perhaps my semblance may deceive the truth,  
That I to manhood am arrived so near ;  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear.”

Industrious waiting will not necessarily make  
Miltons, but it improves the chances.





### XVIII.

#### FAVOURITE AUTHORS.



EARLY everybody, it may be supposed, who reads at all, likes some books and some authors better than other books and authors. The qualification of "nearly" is necessary, because there is a very considerable number of people with such flaccid minds as to be incapable of a deliberate preference either in literature or anything else. To be able to place one thing over another, it is requisite to go through at least a certain amount of exertion, and the flaccid mind is not equal to the effort. In the midst of all that is said, and not unjustly, as to the increasing taste for books, we are apt to forget that people who read with intelligence and edification are still a very tiny minority of those who profess to have opinions, and who really influence the opinions of others. Women,



for instance, as a rule, are not thoughtful readers. They are so intensely practical, in the narrowest, and often the worst, sense of the term, as to look with habitual distrust upon those general ideas which it is the chief business of literature to sow. After a young lady has got into the post-Tennysonian period—that is to say, as soon as she is married and has children—it usually appears that her mind is not roomy enough to contain at once a vigorous taste for books and a just interest in the various duties of her position. And women are not the persons most to blame for this. How many husbands, even of the educated sort, would like their wives to be great readers? Wives ought to devote their time, it is said, not to books, but to their children. That is to say, those who have to exercise the deepest and most lasting influence upon the growing generation are themselves to take the least possible pains to make that influence the fruit of knowledge and enlightenment. But the heart, it is argued, teaches more wisely than books.

The same sort of apology is made for everybody who chooses to surrender himself to habits of mental slovenliness, provided his visible conduct does not outrage the ordinary canons. There is a common belief in the existence of some kind of inner light which enables us to dispense all but entirely with any attention to outer lights. It does not teach us arithmetic or Euclid, or Greek verbs or

history, it is true. But of course these are only elements, which it would be beneath the dignity of the intellectual inner light to disclose. After we have got over the elements, then it becomes unspeakably brilliant and instructive. To say of a man that at any rate his heart is in the right place is at once held to cover over most handsomely the fact that he is a narrow, ignorant, bigoted block-head. Most of the mischief in the world has been brought about by men with hearts in the right place. Still the strong prevalence of this fallacy makes people unconsciously indifferent, after a certain point, to sustained intellectual culture. They know they mean well, and they believe, though without expressing their faith in a verbal formula, that, after all, experience of life and the light of nature together reduce books to the rank of a sort of luxury which we can do either with or without.

Hence, to revert to our starting-point, not one reader in a thousand devotes to the very best books he ever happens to read (of course except for professional purposes) a fraction of the close attention which he had to give in his youth to "Nine Times" in the Multiplication Table, or to the Forty-seventh Proposition of the First Book of Euclid. The majority of books are as unworthy of receiving this attention as the majority of readers are unwilling to give it; but unless a man is in the habit of reading a few books which are worthy of it, he must

be considered a very unfortunate person. Not that, as a matter of fact, those who only give a bit of their minds to any book they read are any less positive that it is a good book or a bad book, than they are that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third side. There is something delightful in the perfect conclusiveness and authority with which they pronounce sentence, having just caught a fragment of the evidence here and there, as their attention happened accidentally to be on the alert, and having perhaps by an unlucky chance fallen asleep over the part which contained the very gist and pith of the whole. For this reason a good deal of the strong preference which one hears professed for this book or that, of the vehement admiration for one author or the other, must be taken with a large allowance. Mental inertia on the one hand, and mental hastiness and temerity on the other, hinder people from forming solid judgments of books as of other things, but they comparatively seldom stand in the way of a dogmatic enunciation of something which has all the outside look of a solid judgment.

Nothing is funnier than the airs which most people assume about their favourite author. They think they receive rays of reflected glory from him if he is famous and widely read, or, if not, that in admiring him they are showing a superior discernment to that of the common crowd. *Laudare laudatum*

is only second to *laudari a laudato* as a means of making oneself conspicuous. The truth is, all this time, that they have no more right to talk about a favourite author than a man who has never tasted anything but small beer has to talk about his favourite wine. Let us reflect on the wonderful fact that a writer who has so very little and such poor stuff to give the world as Mr. Tupper is the favourite author of this country. He is the champion of all England. Before him all other philosophers, wits, poets, pale their ineffectual fires. This ought not to be particularly discouraging, because from the very nature of the case no human being who can read Mr. Tupper and enjoy him could possibly enjoy any other author; and, after all, it is better to enjoy a halfpennyworth of skimmed milk than to enjoy nothing at all. There is more nourishment probably in blue milk than in pure water.

Still the soberest of mortals can hardly keep himself from laughing if one holds up this poor washy halfpennyworth as does every other lady you meet, and vows with a preposterous affectation of conviviality that here is the draught for your true hero. The champion favourite is in the long run the kindest friend to those who are severely worsted in the contest for fame; for the author who is smarting most keenly under the neglect of contemporaries finds balm for his wounds and solace for his bruised spirit in the reflection, for which he is probably

indebted to the first friend whom he sees, that, though his book is not read, the 'Proverbial Philosophy' is. This confers a genuine distinction upon an unsold edition, of which every writer of a philosophic temper ought to be deeply sensible. What more damning thing could be said of him than that his book had gone through five-and-twenty editions? Nemesis overtakes the man of unnumbered editions in the shape of the laughter and amazement of posterity. Nobody ever hits the taste of the huge unthinking majority in his own time without going a long way wide of the taste of the next generation, unless indeed civilization makes a temporary move backwards for his express behoof.

Many people speak of their favourite author as advertising tailors might speak of their poet—as some poor devil to whom they are doing rather a good turn by installing him in so exalted a post. The truth is that, if he is a good author, it is to themselves that they are paying the compliment, and not to him. To protest admiration for a writer is to protest in a measure that you understand him, and are up to his level of thought and feeling. Yet we often hear persons talk in language of conventional enthusiasm about poets and philosophers, into the bare outside portico of whose minds they are utterly unable to enter. In praising them they are indirectly bestowing upon themselves a measure



of praise to which they have no title whatever. It would be unreasonable to say that a man has no right to speak of a moralist or a poet as his favourite because in practice he transgresses his favourite's teaching. Inconsistency of this sort is a different thing. Plenty of people have a clear and fervent perception of the beauty and power of the fine poem of 'Love and Duty,' for example, who yet go and straightway yield to love, and quench considerations of duty. This is bad enough, but it comes under a different head. What we mean here is that there is much imposture about favourite authors. People pretend to like writings which they are quite incompetent to fathom, or even to get an inch below the surface of. And then they think somehow that the author ought to be very much obliged to them. Authors have encouraged this delusion by too much whimsical talk about an "over-indulgent" public and the "gentle forbearance of the kind reader." If a reader likes a book, it is he who is indebted to the writer, and not the writer to him, for liking what the writer has done.

A certain measure of praise encourages an author, like his neighbours, but an author is not worth very much who cannot get on very well without it. He may be anxious in moderation about a review, because the want of a review may keep his book back from the public for years; still,



if he knows that he has worked as hard as he could, and given the best ideas he possessed, it is no fault of his if the world will not make him a favourite. If he writes books in return for daily bread, to be a favourite author may be more of an object with him; and this very fact helps to explain the almost universal rule that the best and highest literary work of every generation is not done by the professional writers who have to make a living by the pen. Again, weak human nature may sigh for a little praise and popularity; only a nature which yields to the weakness is very apt to get into a way of swallowing praise omnivorously. There are writers, one may presume, as there are painters, sculptors, and merchants, to whom all flattery is grist that comes to the mill. The eulogy of the wise is pleasant to them, but so is the eulogy of the fool. There is something downright incomprehensible in an indiscriminate appetite of this kind. It is at all events certain that nobody who is a victim to it can enjoy much of his own respect, and thus what he gains in one way he loses in another. It must, moreover, be a bitter drop in the blissful cup of a favourite author to know that he is pretty sure to be the favourite of as many fools as philosophers. Indeed, has not one felt a shock of surprise and bitterness at finding the books of the writer in whom we take the most constant delight, on the shelves of some weak-

mindèd castaway? It is as if we should see a noble statue in an ignoble and obscene place. An author ought at least to feel as angry as one of his disciples at such incongruity. The admiration of the weak-minded castaway ought to be positively displeasing to him. Too often, however, it is not, and all is fish that comes to the net.

There is one source of vexation to which even the favourites are frequently exposed, though it ought, in fact, to be very instructive to them. A poet, say, is enchanted to find that a lady thinks his productions all that is delicate and profound and rich. She sits with endless reverence and admiration at his poetic feet. But presently he finds, not merely that he is not the only deity whose image has a place in her temple, but that in the next niche to his own, and adored with like honours, is the writer whom of all others he thinks the stupidest, emptiest, and most generally despicable. The steam of the incense ascends as plentifully for some superficial dolt as for his own high and mighty genius. His autograph, which was prayed for and obtained with so much enthusiasm, he finds, to his mortification, placed next in the idolatrous collection to that of the most over-rated fool in the universe. The slave is sitting by his side in the triumphal car. But, though exasperating, this discipline is very salutary. There is very often a sequel to it, more salutary still.

Worshippers are inconstant. The most tremendously enthusiastic among them are often the most capricious. The idol of to-day is dashed in pieces before the end of the twelvemonth, and his shrine is taken by another. There are men and women of such elastic mould that every book that they come across is the very best they ever read. Its author is the wisest, greatest, most suggestive, who ever wrote. This exceeding changefulness indicates a charming flexibility and openness of intelligence, but it may be carried too far, and it is not without its social inconveniences. You parted from one of these persons a week ago, full of admiration for the writings of Mr. Carlyle, say. On meeting him again, you presume that time enough has scarcely elapsed for this admiration to have passed away. But time was made for slaves. Your assumption is no sooner acted upon than it instantly appears that he has been reading something else, which sends all that Mr. Carlyle has to say gibbering into space. It is unfeeling, and even indelicate, to remind him of his equally vast enthusiasm on the other side seven days before. Mr. Carlyle is much too sensible to care a straw whether a disciple sticks to him or not. But the second-rate man, who sincerely relishes being a favourite author, is much wounded. And if he was hugely elated at the adherence of the capricious man, it is reasonable that he should be as hugely

depressed at his defection. Those who think much, and love their work for itself, and have really got something to say, miss one of these moods, but then they also escape the other, so they are not without their compensation.

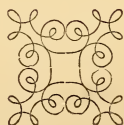
Even those who with sincerity and competent judgment have a favourite author, one whose thoughts they can appreciate with genuine sympathy, and whom they do not take up for a whim of the hour, are exposed to perils of their own. There is no greater bore than the man of one book, or the man who is content on every subject to swear by the authority of one master. Everybody knows an example or two of this narrowing and excessive admiration. There is at least one great living writer, himself an eager and able assailant of the habit of taking things on trust, and yet whose *ipse dixit* is too often made to serve instead of an argument by injudicious followers. It is in this way that the world gets on so slowly. The adventurous discoverer gets a reputation and a set of disciples, who forthwith declare that discovery can go no further, and set their faces dead against the adventurous temper which was the chief distinction of their master. It is not good for men to worship idols. A favourite author, therefore, ought not to be allowed to get too strong a hold on one. Perhaps it would be a safe general rule never to elevate a writer to this position of power over us.

until we are quite sure that we know that he has a weak side, and in what direction to look for it. It is a very bad thing to have even a good despot to rule over us, and to save us the trouble of doing our own thinking. Hence, instead of flying into a passion, as they usually do when they hear their favourite poet or philosopher ever so justly attacked, and the erroneous or defective part of his teaching ever so pungently shown up, people ought to be extremely grateful, and to make the best possible use of the opportunity.

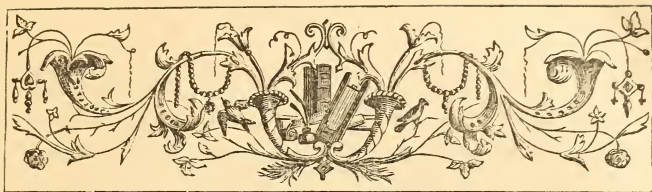
And here let an important distinction be drawn between a man's character and his teaching, otherwise what has been said may be mistaken for a piece of peculiarly detestable poorness of soul. Whatever makes us think the worse of a favourite character is so far an evil. We should be the reverse of thankful to anybody who should dwell, for instance, on the weak points in the personal character or conduct of such a man as Johnson or Burke or Wesley. Of course, if you find a man worshipping a thoroughly bad and unworthy person, it is a plain duty to teach him to worship somebody better by showing him how false a god he has got at present. But if the character is in the main and substantially worthy of reverence, it is worse than pitiful work to labour to show up its weak points, or to be always on the look-out for them on one's own account. Excellent persons,



however, may plainly talk great nonsense. Burke was often so violent in his doctrine as to pass for a madman. Johnson was a Tory. Wesley believed in ghosts. All three held a great many views which it would be a charity to expel from the minds of those disciples who insist on holding every jot and tittle of what their masters taught, and just as it was held by them. And it is the same with all favourite leaders. Revere their strength or purity of character as much as you will ; but it is a dire mistake to swear by all they have said on subjects which ought to be submitted to independent judgment, and not settled by general sympathies.







## XIX.

### DRAWING-ROOM CRITICS.

**T**HE appearance of a book which is read by all the world, always affords an excellent opportunity of measuring the taste, judgment, and discrimination of the people for whom books are supposed to be written. A novel by an eminent author calls forth an amount of unwritten criticism which illustrates the force and diversity of popular opinion on literary matters with more completeness than any other kind of composition. A man or woman with ever so mean an understanding and ever so small an interest in things still feels perfectly competent to crown or condemn a novel. It is the same with paintings, and very nearly the same with music. History, philosophy, science, they sagaciously leave alone. These are delicate subjects for people who know nothing about them, because they can scarcely advance a step without making

their ignorance conspicuous. But in what are called light subjects the case is different, and all art is looked upon as a light subject. With a vile affectation of humility, these critics of the parlour ostentatiously avow that they don't understand high art, and are entirely ignorant of grand critical principles; still they know what gives them pleasure, and they are not sure whether this, after all, is not as good a test as another of artistic success.

This modest way of putting the case really veils a profound conviction that, though not learned in the pedantry of academies, they have a fine natural insight into the True and the Beautiful which is worth infinitely more than all that academies have got to teach. At bottom they sincerely believe that the pleasure which they derive from a book or a song or a picture is in truth the standard of its worth. And the giving of pleasure may be an end of all artistic composition. Only it is worth remembering that everything depends on the sort of people to whom a piece is fit to give pleasure. The jovial song which fills with delirious transports the dull brain of a beery clown in an alehouse may not be very admirable in ears polite. And the young ladies, for example, who pass sentence so unflinchingly on novels might perhaps usefully remember that neither the tears which the woes of a heroine can draw from them, nor the warm sympathy with which they at length see her united to

a constant lover, can be taken for a conclusive proof that the novelist's work has been well done, any more than their falling asleep over the middle of the second volume is a proof that he has done his work ill. Too often they are as little able to appreciate the best and highest kind of fiction as the beery clown would be to appreciate one of Beethoven's sonatas or one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*. The incapacity, which in the one case comes of beer and dulness combined, is in the other the simpler fruit of dulness and no beer.

There is something very wonderful in the extent to which people shamelessly allow their judgments to grow out of feelings that are no better than sheer caprices. For instance, in the drawing-room it is commonly considered an altogether fatal defect in a novel not to end well. An excellent story recently concluded in a way which every novelist whose single aim is a wide popularity ought to ponder by day and by night. The sorely-tried hero is left comfortably snoring by the side of the no less sorely-tried heroine. The reader was charmed at an end so undeniably satisfactory and blissful. The same novelist, in another book, furnishes a warning as instructive as his example in the last case. A young lady who had been very badly used by one lover, instead of making up her mind to accept the other lover who wishes to use her well, resolves to go on wearing

the willow to the day of her death. Cries against the injustice of an author who could leave so charming a heroine in such pitiful plight resounded on all sides from an outraged public. Perhaps it was the general anger at the fate of Lily Dale which made the author resolve to go to the opposite extreme in finally disposing of his next hero. Lucy of Lammermoor is in many respects one of Scott's best stories, but it would have been far more popular if Lucy and Edgar had been left to live happy ever after. There are popular critics of this temper who would like 'Hamlet' much better if, instead of the curtain falling on a dozen corpses, the final tableau had consisted of old Polonius giving his blessing to Ophelia and the Prince, kneeling with clasped hands at his feet. On the same principle also, we presume, it must ever be regarded as a sad fault in the composition of another tragedy, that Othello did not find out a little sooner that Desdemona was faithful, and that Iago had been making a fool of him all the time. This prevailing passion for a happy ending is only a caprice after all. There can be no conceivable principle of composition to countenance such a passion. It is about as defensible as Lord Byron's notion that all music should be played quick.

A still more spacious field for the exhibition of the caprice of the critics who do not use pens for their criticism is found in determining what they

will regard as interesting. If a novel is really and undoubtedly uninteresting, it is only fit to be cast into the fire. But it is impossible to gather what special qualities those are which novel-readers agree in requiring as the conditions of their interest. The controversy whether a given story is highly interesting or deeply dull sometimes divides a whole house against itself, setting the father against the son, and a mother against her daughter, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law. Not seldom do the dissentient critics let their angriest passions rise against one another. One refuses to take any sort of interest in a rude young radical who wears a cloth cap and goes without a shirt-collar, and makes known his opinions in season and out of season, to people who like them and people who hate them, indifferently. Another scornfully asks what rational being can feel concern about one of those slight, yellow-haired, glittering-eyed, metallic-voiced young murderesses who are so conspicuous, and so very generally popular, in modern fiction. A third person likes Radicals, and does not much object to a yellow-haired woman with violent passions, yet will not tolerate for a heroine an insipid young woman who has no character in particular, but is in a state of constant perplexity as to which of two lovers she likes best, first jilting one, then the other, and finally returning to somebody else who preceded



them both in her uncertain affections. The drawing-room critics, instead of cultivating a broad expansive taste, and making their interests as wide as possible, like to worship only one idol and one style. They either narrow their partialities to love-stories simply, or to stories of love and murder artistically mixed, or else to stories of character. On whatever style they may ultimately fix, they resolutely disparage every other. Where there is a largish family of novel-reading daughters, this narrowness proves, as Mrs. Lirriper would say, "fruitful hot-water for all parties." Their discussions are endless, just because they are aimless. Each is a great deal too well acquainted with the iron resolution of the others to hope to effect a conversion. Still, young ladies who argue, like some young men and some old men, rest all their hopes in what has been called, we do not know why, the Italian mode of argument, which consists in repeating the disputed assertion a certain number of times in precisely the same words in which it was first made. To a sensible man this very soon brings conviction, because he would rather recant his most fondly-cherished doctrine on the subject of a novel than prolong so monotonous a controversy with even the handsomest antagonist.

It is indeed the tendency of all disputes as to whether a certain character is interesting or dull, mean or admirable, generous or stupid, to partake



of that energy which is naturally evoked in talking about persons, either real or fictitious. This energy among people of an enthusiastic temperament occasionally arrives at an unpleasant degree of heat, and to unimpassioned bystanders may be quite as amusing as the novel which has generated such warmth.

Nor is this the only point in which it is possible for a novel to divert us less than the domestic criticism to which it gives rise. Disputes both as to probability of incident and consistency of character constantly reveal wondrous depths of psychological knowledge, and wondrous theories as to the way in which the world goes on. The question whether any woman that ever was born would have been reclaimed from a frivolous and small way of looking at things by the brusque reproaches of so audacious a young man as Felix Holt, who wore a cloth cap and no collar, is evidently susceptible of endless discussion among a class who have not yet been reclaimed from a frivolous and small way of looking at things either by young men with caps or young men with the best hats. This leads up to strange disputations as to whether a man like Felix Holt was likely to have fallen in love with a woman like Esther Lyon. Women generally seem to think that he was too grave and too much in earnest; but men, who often know more of these things than the sex which has an overrated cha-

racter for sensibility, insist that the grave and thoughtful man is rather more likely to fall in love with a pretty, graceful, light-hearted woman, than if he were as vain and light-hearted as she is. An attentive observer of the general current of teachable criticism may get out of it a considerable knowledge of female character; and we are not sure that a man in search of a wife could have many better ways of finding out the disposition of a candidate for his hand than putting her a series of questions upon the nature and conduct of the various people in one or two good novels. For when a lady maintains that somebody in a novel, if he had acted consistently, would have acted in a certain way, she perhaps generally means no more than that this is the way in which she herself would have acted. The only drawback to the trustworthiness of this method is the artificial style which enters so largely into all conversation, and more particularly into the conversation between young women and young men. They habitually talk in falsetto. If they did not, the debates over novels might be amazingly instructive to anybody who happened to take an interest in the average sense and discernment of his acquaintances.

There is more especially a large fund of instruction in the talk which goes on over a novel which is either coming out in parts, or of which the third volume cannot be procured from the circulating

library. Conjectures as to the way in which it will all end, what will become of so-and-so, whether the curate will marry the earl's daughter, whether the groom will turn out to be the heir to a barony in disguise, whether the heroine has three or only two husbands alive, whether she murdered her so-called sister or only had her confined in an asylum for life—all this opens up a splendid field for speculation, and the answers shed a flood of light on the ingenuity and penetration of the speaker.

It is perhaps enough to say of the critics of the drawing-room that they present all the faults which are vulgarly charged against the professional critic, but in a very exaggerated form, because they are without his sense of responsibility. We very often hear people talk decisively about books which they have barely read. Or, instead of forming an independent opinion, they echo the opinion of somebody else. Or they put forward their views with too little qualification and explanation, using bigger phrases than they are altogether well able to manage. Still it is so important that people should learn not to bolt the books they read, that even a crudish censure or eulogy of a novel is better than a stolid and lethargic apathy or ignorance as to the very existence of a difference between good and bad. Whether this reflection is any consolation to a novelist, or any inducement to competent persons to turn novelists, is more than doubtful.



## XX.

### SYMPATHY WITH NATURE.

**P**EOPLE who are fond of giving very sublime reasons for very simple actions, and of gilding over honest motives with superfine pretences, sometimes urge as a plea for their summer holiday that it refreshes their sympathy with nature. This phrase has a deep sound about it, which makes it excellently calculated to take one in, in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Sympathy with nature is one of those sentiments which, since the poetic revival at the beginning of the century, have been considered essential to every well-furnished mind. It is a piece of the stock equipment of modern character. The man who lacks it is looked upon, and justly so, as an incomplete being. Only it is far from certain that every one who cries out about Nature does in truth enter into her

kingdom. In this, as in other religions, there is to be heard enough, and too much, of cant and insincere conventionality. The passion for the wonders and beauties and horrors of the external world, like most other high emotions, is an attractive thing for hollow-minded people and simpletons to counterfeit, just because it is high. To those who do not examine too closely, all high things seem vague; and whatever commonly passes for vague is easily imitated, because its distinctive notes are only discernible by the few. Sympathy with nature has its own marks, stamped plainly upon all who are endowed with it, but the world is not very careful to distinguish the true marks from the false. There is no end to the spurious forms which have passed current for genuine, and it is scarcely agreeable to reflect how many of them still survive, in spite of the steady movement of the last two generations towards the true spirit and meaning of nature. The tourist who tells you that he is going to Switzerland or Italy to freshen his passion for nature generally means by it a passion for dawdling in the sunshine with nothing on his mind. And, of course, there is no harm in such a taste. It is much more creditable than a taste for dawdling about with foolish young women, or over a wine-bottle. To be able to luxuriate in simple sunny inactivity is a quality of a healthy character. But there is nothing gained



by giving a fine-sounding name to what is, after all, only unobjectionable laziness, and is wholly unfruitful of positive results upon character.

If, however, nothing is gained by such a counterfeit as this, at least there is no great harm done, beyond conferring on a man a shade more of self-satisfaction than he is entitled to. This is more than can be said of another and still more prevalent imposture in the same matter. A school of younger men has arisen—nor do they lack a consecrating bard—who persuade themselves that sympathy with nature means, and means exclusively, a fiery revelling in her sensuous delights, added to an abject grovelling before her sterner moods. What they call sympathy is, in fact, a mixture of a drunken fondness for bright colours and heavy scents, with a dismal conviction that these are only meant to befool us while we are being crushed under the feet of malignant ruthless gods. In time, the thought of the malignity and the ruthlessness becomes as attractive to them as the joys which they frantically purvey for their senses. Among other reasons for this is the deep consolation which reflections upon the malignity of fate bring to minds inflamed with spite and detestation against their kind. The man whose belief never goes beyond the gratification of his own senses cannot fail to despise and hate all who arrange the objects of life on wider principles.

He likes to gloat over the cruelties of destiny, because, though visiting himself too, they will still curse these objects of his hatred, and repay them for the vile sin of exalting reason, instead of feasting and inflaming their senses. It pleases him to reflect that the gods are "too great to appease, too high to appal, too far to call," and he is willing to defy them for his own part, for the glee which they provide for him in the distresses laid upon his neighbours. In such cases love of nature is only another name for hatred of the human race.

But sentiments of this kind are not properly understood unless we know something of their source. The existence of so hideous a state of feeling is largely due to a reaction against the old notion that Nature is a sort of Mistress Hannah More—that the spirit of the universe is an old lady with a thoroughly well-regulated disposition according to the best English principles,—the presiding genius, as it were, of a Minerva Academy. Tucker says that when he was first taught his prayers he "used to have the idea of a venerable old man, of a composed benign countenance, with his own hair, clad in a morning-gown of a grave-coloured flowered damask, sitting in an elbow-chair." The vulgar notion of nature is not less homely, nor less irrational. Contempt and resentment were sure to arise against this puny starved

conception of the gigantic forces and processes both of the heart of man and of the universe outside of man. But it would be a very grave misfortune if this resentment were to continue to flow in channels that are far more pestilent for mankind than the misconception which gave birth to such resentment. For this lustful hugging of nature is, in truth, the kindling and feeding of all those barbarous anarchic passions, the control and moderation over which has been the aim of all progress. They are the field of civilization's first and most essential victory.

The new sympathy with nature, so far as it means antipathy to man and contempt for him, is one of the most violently explosive social forces that have ever been discovered. If the idea of self-denial is to be expunged from the list of the things worthy of contemplation, and the practice of self-denial from the list of things worthy of cultivation, then society must inevitably fall to pieces. If all men and women are to insist on drinking to the dregs the cup of every desire of their animal nature, without a thought of the effects which may flow from their gratification, then it is plain that most of the business of the world will come to a standstill. People will have no time to labour, and they will have no inclination either, for, self-control being a pale-blooded and trumpery virtue, there can be no

reason why the idle should not help himself to whatever he may want from the stores of the industrious. There can be no more deadly and baneful influence than one which teaches men to prefer anything under the sun to the happiness of the whole mass of sentient creatures. Beauty, truth, justice, every virtue, every pursuit, every taste—they are all good because, and just in so far as, they augment this stock. Whatever makes a man indifferent to the extension of happiness and the corresponding curtailment of the too wide domains of pain and misery, is doing the worst ill that can possibly be done to his whole character. After all, the end of everything is living. Conduct is at once the aim and the test of all our learning and thinking and striving. The man lives most perfectly whose most constant happiness is found in the consciousness that, in doing the best that he can for himself, he is also doing the best that he can for every being that is capable of having good done to it. Supposing it were true, as fiery poets of despair are never weary of crying aloud to us, that Nature hates us, and that the gods are never found by our prayers. Is not this all the more reason why we should be as gods to one another?

Nature may be as stern and implacable as they say, but at least she has been kind in implanting the capacity for pity in the souls of the creatures she has abandoned. This single boon may in some

sort atone for the lack of all other good gifts, if there be such a lack. Granting that we are left alone on the face of the earth, does it follow, or is it reasonable to suppose, that the only thing for us to do is to borrow all our motives and mould all our passions from the example of tigers and tigresses? Everybody admits, it may be said, that pity is a duty, and to insist on this is to insist on a truism. But truisms need to be repeated in the face of a mischievous paradox. They are only useless when everybody concedes them. An evil spirit has arisen which scoffs at pity, inviting us, instead of helping, to stand easily by and laugh at the Great Human Comedy.

Nothing among the curiosities of mental history can be more odd than that this temper should find its origin or its chief encouragement in a distorted passion for external nature. Acting on a healthy spirit, the contemplation of the order of life and growth and constant change in material things would seem to be the surest instrument for breeding humanity and evenness of mind. For contemplation of nature tends, above all other things, to fill people, who are susceptible of deep feeling of any sort, with awe, and few states of mind are so favourable as this of awe to the development of wide sentiments of beneficence. Awe, unless it be the servile awe of the gaping uncultured clown, is one of the most ennobling of all emotions, and



no emotion has any title to be called noble at all which does not throw a man into deeper harmony with everything that is going on around him. To widen the circle of his sensibilities, and to discover the wisest means for making these sensibilities of use in the world, are the two great aims, though perhaps not distinctly realized, of the philosophic liver. The creatures, albeit creatures of genius, who skip to and fro raving about their sensibilities, and basely indifferent to the feelings and interests of the rest of men, may have a wordy sympathy with nature, but it is worth not much to themselves, and nothing at all to mankind. They contribute less to the existing stock of good things than if they had been virtuous tinkers.\*

\* I venture to add in this place a passage in which I was criticizing a remarkable poet of our time, who habitually "leaves those lofty seats of passion, where the mind is exhilarated and inspired as by the winds that sweep from over the unmeasured waste of the sea, and betakes himself into tropical swamps of passion, where everything is sweltering in fierce and consuming heat, where there are uncouth destructive monsters, and where even the flowers and plants are of a size and form to fill men with fear."

"In the midst of this vigour there has as yet been no sign in his writing of that great quality without which genius is worth so little to the world. It is not easy to find an adequate name for this very salt of genius. Perhaps Beneficence is as good as any that we are likely to find; and by it is meant the enlarged and humane sympathy with all happiness, whether of man or beast, or bird or creeping thing, the lofty fervent pity for all the pain of body and pain of soul endured among sentient creatures, and, above all, the strong enthusiasm for all that has been done

Perhaps one of the most certain signs that the true meaning of sympathy with nature has been more extensively recognized in our times, in spite of the growth of this new and plague-stricken school, is the visible spread of the idea that every sentient creature ought to be treated with humanity, just as much as the members of our own species. As a corollary to that advance of enlightenment which prevents us from maltreating lunatics and burning ugly old women, we have learnt, though not very universally, the propriety of consideration for all sorts of ugly and foul animals and reptiles. Loathing and terror in the presence of hideous and monstrous shapes has become exchanged for a gentle pity. It is seen that these dumb and helpless things have a capacity for something which at least passes with them for pleasure. Who that has read it can forget the French poet's picture of the black venomous toad

to add to the stock of happiness, and to take away somewhat from the stock of anguish, in the world. This genial breath of life it is the business of the poet above all others to breathe into men. It is this beneficence which makes Victor Hugo so vastly pre-eminent among the poets of the time. His 'passion and power in dealing with the higher things of nature, with her large issues and remote sources,' would be very sublime in any case, but their nobleness is enlarged and enriched a thousandfold by what we have called his spirit of Beneficence. The greatest of poets are neither mere subtle-minded vivacious elves and sprites, frisking about in the heated places of passion simply for the joy of frisking, nor mere giants, surveying all life indifferently as Epicurean Gods."

squatting meekly on the edge of its stagnant ditch on a summer evening, and relishing in its own humble way the calm of the surrounding scene ?\* There are plenty of grown-up people of cultivation still to be found who would scarcely feel that they were doing anything very wrong if they gave the poor monster a poke with a stick, or set a dog on to plague him. But there are fewer people now of this involuntary unreflecting devilishness than there were twenty years since, and the whole tendency of the modern spirit is to make such people fewer still. Respect for happiness, even in the rudest and most uncouth shape which we can imagine happiness as assuming, is more widely perceived to be one of the first of social duties.

\* "Take the well-known picture of 'The Toad' in the '*Légende des Siècles*.' The hideous creature is squatting in the road in a summer evening, enjoying itself after its humble fashion. Some boys pass by, and amuse themselves by digging out its eyes, striking off its limbs, making holes in it. The wretched toad tries feebly to crawl away into the ditch. Its tormentors see an ass coming on drawing a cart, so, with a scream of delight, they bethink themselves to put the toad in the rut where it will be crushed by the wheel of the cart. The ass is weary with his day's work and his burden, and sore with the blows of his master, who even then is cursing and bethwacking him. But the ass turns his gentle eye upon the rut, sees the torn and bleeding toad, and with a painful effort drags his cart off the track. The whole picture gives one a heart-ache, but the gentleness of the ass is the single touch which makes the thought of so much horror endurable. In the '*Toilers of the Sea*' we almost miss this single touch. Watching the sea year after year in the land of his exile, Victor Hugo has seen in it nothing but sternness and

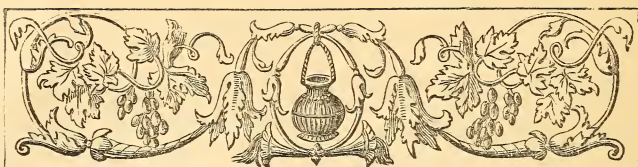
There are all sorts of mistakes and affectations perpetrated by kind-hearted but weak-headed persons who try to make others happier, unconscious that they are going on principles that must eventually augment the general stock of misery; and it is right that these mistakes and affectations should be exposed and denounced. Still, the spread of the universally beneficent temper in which they have at least a partial origin is one of the most essential conditions of the progress of civilization. And even when most thickly set in defects of taste and judgment, such a temper is

cruelty. He finds it only the representative of the relentless Fatality of Nature, which man is constantly occupied in combating and wrestling with. It is so real, so tragically effective, that such a reflection as that 'Time writes no wrinkle on its azure brow' must seem the merest mimicry of poetic sentiment. The attitude which he has before assumed towards Society he also takes towards external Nature. To Keats Nature presented herself as a being whom even the monsters loved and followed, a goddess with white and smooth limbs, and deep breasts, teeming with fruit and oil and corn and flowers. Compared with the sensuous passion of Keats, the feeling of Wordsworth for Nature was an austere and distant reverence. He found in her little more than a storehouse of emblems for the better side of men. Victor Hugo is impressed by Nature, not as a goddess to be sensuously enclasped, not as some remote and pure spirit, shining cold yet benign upon men, but as man's cruel and implacable foe. Other poets have loved to make her anthropomorphic, and to invest her with the moral attributes of mortals. He holds with no such personification of Nature as a whole. Nature to him is little more than a chaos of furious and warring Forces."—*From another Essay by the present writer.*

unspeakably to be preferred to the childish cynicism of brainless young men about town and worn-out old men at clubs, or the empty ravings of men of genius who mistake grossness for passion, and unrestrained sensuality for nature.







## XXI.

### RURAL DELIGHTS.



IN the summer-time of the year, everybody with the slightest love of nature persuades himself that, if he were master of circumstances, he would never live anywhere but in the country. And a great many people amuse themselves by trying to think seriously that they are going to take a place in the country, and by picturing to themselves all its perfections and delights. They have exquisite visions of croquet-lawns, and delicious borders of flowers, and of the poetic cow and homely pig in the background. They think how glorious it must be to feel the scents of the garden, and to hear the singing of the birds through one's bedroom window on getting up in the morning, and to watch the moon rise over the pine-tops as one goes to bed at night. The stuffiness and frowsiness of

town-houses in the summer, and that amazing compound smell of paving-stones and horse-dung which fills the London streets so mysteriously, naturally inspires these beatific thoughts. The house-agent with a Tennysonian genius for word-painting counts his victims by hundreds. The great secret that when he talks of a house in the midst of fields, he commonly means brickfields, is only discovered by degrees; and it is not until we have wasted many days, and spent a great many pounds in railway fares and the hire of rural chaises to take us across country, that we realize what painful differences of opinion there may be among people as to what constitutes a desirable residence.

After all, the house agent is himself a little victimized. The intention of living in the country is, with nine out of ten people who entertain it, a sheer delusion. They are quite honest, and have fully convinced themselves that they can only lead the ideal life among the green fields and the little birds and the vegetables. Still at bottom there is a lurking fear that after all they might find the country somewhat less of a paradise than they love to think it. And they are perfectly right, for nature, with her usual fondness for compensation, has put some rather heavy drawbacks into the scale against the delights of the fields. For example, the country is a very trying place for ladies. One of the chief delights of living in the country, to

people accustomed to towns, is its splendid roominess. You have a large flower-garden, and a large kitchen-garden, and airy meadows, and unnumbered out-houses and offices, which, though of no particular use to speak of, fill the mind with a sense of spaciousness and overflowing accommodation. Then there are big woods at the back of the house, and breezy downs in front, and you are at least half-a-dozen miles from the nearest country town. All this gives one a noble feeling of freedom and expansiveness, and a notion that you are leading the life according to nature, which is quite true ; only married ladies and grown-up daughters are not always clear after a little experience, that the life according to nature is the pleasantest sort of life. For this admirable roominess implies that you are without neighbours, and women without neighbours are generally creatures of stunted lives. Neighbours are to them what his club and his profession and his newspaper are to one of the so-called sterner sex. It is all very well for the gentleman who is writing a great and immortal book, or for one who goes up to business every morning and comes down again at night, and who in truth has Sunday only to spend in his Paradise. But ordinary ladies do not write great books, and they have nothing to do all the solid day except a little gardening and novel-reading and piano-playing, and perhaps occasionally writing letters to

friends in town containing ecstatic accounts of the delights of the country. The visits of some adjoining curate with a pony may make pleasant oases, but not even the whole of a young lady's mind can be absorbed every day in wondering all the forenoon whether the curate will come over in the afternoon.

In all the nonsense that lovers talk, there is nothing so common or so nonsensical as the resolution that when they are married they will live in some charming nest far remote from the busy haunts of men. The truth is that a young married woman is just the last person in the world who ought to be left neighbourless. Accustomed all her life to the pleasant talk of her mother, and the stimulating disputatiousness of her younger sisters, she is utterly lonely as soon as her lord gets back again into his groove of work which he has temporarily left for the purposes of the honeymoon. The charming nest becomes a very palace of boredom and weariness; and she may even find herself committing the monstrous crime of half-wishing herself at home again among the polite wranglings of her unmarried sisters, who at all events kept her from being dull. It is very charming to think of the moon rising over the pine-tops, but the moon does not rise over the pine-tops in the daytime; and the scent of flowers, always delicious in itself, does not count for friends and companions. Even breezy downs and woods will not make up for lack

of human voices. It is not everybody who has such a passion for nature as to be able to make friends with a great black down, or a forest of pine-trees, or a clump of high-standing beeches. There are people who can strike up companionships of this sort with every inanimate object, from the wide sea, down to the daisy nodding its head in the sun. But such people are not very numerous. To be able to feel this friendship for objects that make no articulate response is exclusively the mark of the poetic nature, and young ladies, though ready to compose any number of the sweetest verses, are at bottom thoroughly prosaic.

Men, like women, do not always find life in the country so perfectly blissful as they supposed. The gardener is a sore tribulation and thorn in the flesh. The graceful contempt with which he treats any suggestion you may be bold enough to make about your own wishes respecting your own garden, the compassionate smile with which he listens to any notion you may have got from a horticultural treatise, the rapidity with which he demolishes any disposition on the part of his employer to give himself any little airs—in short, all the characteristics of a superior person, help to make the garden less a delight than a place of torment. He handles your humblest remark in a way which proves to you what a very silly and ignorant person you must be; and with this pleasant conviction about



yourself, you retreat, humiliated and crestfallen, into your library, or else feel constrained to rush off to town, where the contempt of the master you employ follows you, and makes you feel foolish and uncomfortable half the day. The only plan for getting any peace and comfort out of your garden is to surrender it gracefully and without contention. If he is never interfered with, never advised nor requested nor questioned about things, the gardener may prove a very affable man, occasionally descending from his pedestal to let you know what he is going to do with this or that, in a really gracious and patronizing manner, which makes you feel as pleased and honoured as a school-boy does when his master speaks to him on general subjects in the peculiar pedagogic fashion of condescension.

Then, just as the gardener is so very much too good, the other men in the place are very much too bad. The village joiner, the plumber, the plasterer, the man who has a vague and altogether fictitious reputation for "doing things" about the house and the stables—these exasperate you as much by their vices as the gentleman in the hot-house by his abominable virtue. One of the greatest charms about a country-house is that there is always something which wants doing. The master of the house is kept in a steady-flowing stream of excitement about little repairs. Pipes,

cisterns, tanks, drains, flues, furnish a never-failing pretext for invasions of torpid masons and plumbers. As soon as the smoke has been persuaded to go peaceably up the chimney, the water refuses to flow into the tank, or else it refuses to flow out of the tank except by taking the newly-papered drawing-room wall *en route*. When the mason is sent for, you learn that, like Balbus in the exercise-book, he is building a house with his own hand, six miles off; or else like Balbus's friend Caius, he has gone into the city for the sake of purchasing. Then you have moles in your meadow, and rats in your hay-stack, and you have the pleasure of seeing the little mounds in the one and the little holes in the other go on rapidly increasing for days and days until it suits the good pleasure of the man who "does things" to bring his mole-traps and his ferrets. Then, again, bills are a great trouble, not from their amount, but from their impenetrable intricacy. Why should one find put all in one line a man's labour for a day and a quarter, four pounds of green paint, and three feet of half-inch board, in all amounting to seven shillings and eightpence? How is a plain man to disentangle a statement of this sort, so as to know how much he pays for green paint, how much for the half-inch board, and how much for the day and quarter of the man—whom, by the way, he only remembers to have seen at work for a couple of hours one

afternoon? Of course it is impossible, and all payments of this sort must be made simply on the strength of faith. This is evidently a very unpleasant principle for people with a financial mind.

Still the plain man may console himself that at least he gets all his vegetables for nothing. But it is ten to one that he will one day unluckily make this vaunt to some cold-hearted political economist from London, who will ruthlessly prove to him that each stick of asparagus costs him on an average about eightpence, each cucumber several shillings, and so on in proportion down to the humblest vegetable that grows. Cicero says that many very remarkable philosophers were so unable to endure the manners either of the people or its leaders, that they went to live in the country, *delectati re suâ familiari*. In our time, as it happens, the very remarkable philosopher is a sympathizer with the *mores populi*. But the less remarkable philosopher may perhaps find that, so far from being delighted with his domestic arrangements and the dwellers in the fields, both are much more unendurable than their counterparts would have proved if he had stayed in town.

It is not to be denied that rural life, in those who are only trying their 'prentice hands at it, tends to develop the virtue of hospitality to a very high degree of perfection indeed. Perhaps it would be truer to say that it develops one half of

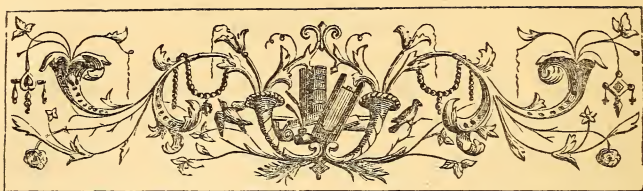
it, and makes us more eager to welcome the coming, than to speed the parting guest. Nobody is ever so welcome in town as the man who comes down to a country place laden with papers and all sorts of gossip. If we used to find him dull and commonplace, his character and conversation have now about them an unequalled savour and piquancy. If he used to be a chattering bore, he is now the most amusing and instructive of companions.

Yet, for all this, for people with sufficient force of character (and of a certain kind of character) to be able to live a great deal upon their own resources, the country is by far the most congenial home. They find all sorts of new sympathies arise, and their whole sense of the companionship of nature is at once quickened and gratified. The very monotony of dark heaths and green fields and hedgerows is imposing, and it is the more imposing to a man who learns the infinite change of growth and colour and form which is constantly at work under this seeming monotony. Every process of nature, from the slow stately progress of masses of cloud down to the fierce contests of the tiny adders on a pond-edge, and the battles of insects in the sun, becomes interesting and suggestive, and a man of a certain sort positively luxuriates in the contemplation of the incessant life and growth and decay about him. This consciousness of never-ending movement around him far more than com-

pensates for the minute vexations incident to life in places where the civilized organization of towns has not reached. But then people of another sort find the vexations far weightier than the joys, and they only think that a man must be an idiot for preferring partially uncomfortable isolation to the life of the city. So he would be if he were like themselves.







## XXII.

### TOWN AND COUNTRY.

**I**T has been recently suggested in a fashionable newspaper that all the London people who have only moderate independent incomes should immediately go away, and live in the towns and villages of the country. They would be so much better off there, if they only knew it. In London or its suburbs they have to pay enormous house-rent, they are not even acquainted with their next-door neighbours, and they are positive nobodies. If they would only go to those hundred charming country towns and villages which, as it is, are steadily on the decrease in population and prosperity, they would mix with other families, would have no difficulty in marrying off their daughters, would enjoy better health, would save money, and in ever so many other ways would find themselves happier

and better off. They would also have the satisfaction of knowing that they were doing more good in the world. The charming country towns would be equally improved by this infusion of "maiden ladies and widows with small incomes, officers on half-pay, and retired tradesmen of moderate fortune." To a dispassionate observer, we may confess, the ordinary country town seems even now to have more than enough of these desirable residents. With the addition of the lawyer, the half-dozen clergymen, and doctors, and a bank-manager or two, the whole fashionable population appears to be made up of maiden ladies and widows with small incomes, and retired tradesmen of moderate fortune. Still the proposal of so tremendous a measure of emigration is worth thinking about.

Very few people, except those who are too busy to give their minds to it, are quite contented with the place in which they are living. If in the town, men and women complain of expense and dirt and noise. When they get into the country, they suffer ten times more from a deadly and dismal dulness which must be felt to be understood. Nothing can be sillier than the attempts sometimes made to settle in a decisive way the relative advantages of life in London and in the provinces—life in towns and life among the fields and lanes. Still, before the genteel emigrants from Bloomsbury and Highbury accept the advice with which they have

been favoured, and hasten away into the country towns, it would be well for them to strike some sort of balance between what they give up and what they hope to get in return.

There are two great and obvious advantages about living in London, to old ladies and retired gentlemen who have no work or business. In the first place, they may do whatever they like, short of getting into the police-courts and the papers, without any apprehension of being talked about. Certainly, if a widow with a small income habitually drove up to her own door at one or two in the morning in a noisy Hansom, she would probably be conscious that she was the subject of much tattle in the street. But, as a rule, people who live in London are very happy to mind their own business, and to leave their neighbours alone. In these charming country towns, on the other hand, anybody would be thought grossly wanting in his or her duty to society who failed to take the keenest interest in the affairs of everybody else in the place. Income, family, past history, personal habits, are all registered in a great unwritten record with the minute precision of a census paper. You cannot expect to have all this delightful information about your neighbours without conferring the same gratification upon them in turn with respect to yourself. They must have their *quid pro quo*. One of the great advantages of the proposed

emigration would be the stimulus which it would give to these sociological inquiries. If some enterprising person were to lead a colony of fifty old widows, or fifty retired tradesmen, with their families, to settle in one of these delightful stagnant towns, the effect upon the intellect of the place could only be compared to that of a movement like the Renaissance, or the Revival of Letters. The mind of the oldest inhabitant would be stirred to its lowest depths, and a development of the acquisitive and inventive faculties would take place such as it had never entered into the heart of man to conceive. This would be delicious to the country town, but a man bred in cities would probably not relish the notion of having himself and his affairs made the occasion of a great renaissance. Still less would he relish the vigilant tyranny which minute tattle is sure to breed. In the charming country town a single step out of the beaten path of rustic etiquette is certain to lead to a more or less prompt excommunication. The tyranny of opinion in a city is often bad enough, but in villages and decaying towns it is worse to an incredible degree. Suppose the new settler objects to the length of the morning service, and so does not go to church as often as his neighbours; or let him be known to have a copy of a heterodox book in his house, or to express the accursed Laodicean doctrine that a man should be allowed without in-

terference to believe what seems best to him. He will very speedily find himself quite as lonely as if he had stopped in his mother-country in Bloomsbury, with the exception that some old lady will most likely feel it a solemn duty to deal faithfully with him from time to time, and warn him honestly of the evil place for which he is preparing himself.

Even if he should offend rustic laws no more deeply than by liveliness of manner and by a sprightly way of talking, his punishment will be fully as great as he can bear. Liveliness is a distinct breach of good manners in a country town. It is vulgar and ostentatious. It is a sign of shallowness and flippancy of character. It proves clearly that a man is superficial and conceited, and has never mixed in really good society. It is a wicked outrage put upon the great God of Dulness. A brilliant man accidentally stranded, even for a week, in the society of a charming country town, hurts the delicate sensitiveness of the residents as keenly as if he were to carry off their family plate. His jests and good things are received with deprecatory mildness by the more amiable part of his listeners, but by the rest with indignation and hatred. The men look at him half stolidly, half sullenly, and the ladies with an air of feeble discomfort. It may be said that widows with small incomes and retired tradesmen with



moderate fortunes usually want neither to avoid going to church nor to be brilliant, which is quite true. But the dullest people who have lived in busy places all their lives acquire a strongish desire to be allowed to do as they please, as well as occasionally to be amused, and to have the monotony of their lives relieved.

This utter lack of means of amusement or moderate excitement is the second point in which decayed country towns, charming though they be, are inferior to a metropolis for people who are out of active business. In London one may not know one's next-door neighbour, which is an appalling idea to the rural mind, and gives it the most effectual notion of the vastness of this overgrown city. And London people are not too sociable, nor too ready to receive as an intimate acquaintance anybody whom they know nothing about. But in London a man may have scarcely any friends, and still find his life interesting enough. There is the newspaper every morning, and there are the theatres, and there are the parks and the streets. In a country place most men's interest even in the news grows stagnant, and the local journal once a week, or a look now and then at the *Times*, is found quite sufficient to satisfy their curiosity as to the outside world. The atmosphere is wholly unfavourable to a habit of taking interest in things. Of course there is no theatre, or, if

there be one, there is no company; and, if there were both, there is a vague persuasion still lingering in these waste places of the earth that theatres are wrong. As to the want of acquaintances in a big city, a man must have a very curiously constituted mind who would not think it a far more convivial sort of thing to walk about some of the great London streets, with their shops and crowds of people, and horses and carriages, than to go through the dismal ceremonies which mark the hospitalities of small towns in the country.

For young ladies, indeed, such places abound with inexhaustible sources of joy. The charming country town has generally plenty of churches, and this implies a good stock of curates constantly on hand. The most acrimonious member of the Liberation Society might admit that the Church has its uses if he could but see the blessings which half-a-dozen pleasant and sociable curates bring to the young ladies of a decayed town. They organize the most delightful choral societies, which, meeting once or twice a week, combine the excitement of the Opera with the flirtation of an evening party, and yet add to both the delights of piety, because chants and bits out of oratorios alternate with glees and madrigals. Then the young ladies and the curates take sweet counsel together over the coals, and the blankets, and the sick people who want good talk and port-wine. The book-

club is another admirable field for diversion. The struggle which goes on between the fast or mildly free-thinking members and the clergy, on the knotty point whether any book in the faintest degree interesting should be sent for, is almost as capital an opportunity for flirting as the bits of oratorio and the glees. The discussion of books, too, gives room for an interchange of what both parties to it take for ideas; and when young ladies and curates begin to interchange ideas, it is time for any mother with sound views about curates to interfere peremptorily. Life in a country town that is well supplied with curates is no sine-cure to the meritorious mother. It is true, as the fashionable instructor says, that she "marries off her daughters without difficulty." But she could do that in London if she were not too particular about her son-in-law's income and prospects.

A great many people who have no tie to London, or any other large and busy town, go and bury themselves in remote solitudes, with the idea that they are taking the best means to lead a simple and contemplative life. And most of us, when on a spring or autumn walk through fine country, have felt a passing desire to do the same. All looks so fresh and tranquil. Yet there are very few cases in which this plan of life does not prove a failure. Not every man has such depth of resource within himself that he can endure isola-

tion from society without growing morose and dull. If he is a great philosopher or a thoroughly stupid person, he may try the experiment with success. But if he is only of ordinary temper, the monotony of a rural life to which he has not always been accustomed has the worst effect. He furnishes his library with good books, and orders his papers and reviews to be sent regularly, and has a garden and a cow or two and a pig or two, and he means to ask a friend to stay with him twice or thrice a year. The whole thing is delightful for a month. He reads and takes his exercise, and gazes meditatively at the cows at their grazing and the pigs grubbing in their troughs, and he feels that he is communing with nature, and is leading the life of one of her truest sons. But by-and-by communing with nature becomes a bore. The cows and pigs are all very well, but they have no views, and they cannot communicate ideas. The newspaper, which at first was rather snubbed, gets more and more precious, and the advertisements of the play and the operas and the railway trips seem the most valuable part of it. Finally, the foolish man who thought he had much goods laid up for himself gives up the remote solitude; or else, if he is perverse as well as foolish, he clings to it, and brings his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave by sheer monotony and crushing dulness of life.

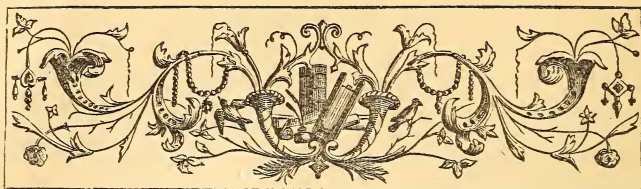
It is scarcely less of a mistake for anybody who

has to live most of the year in one spot to pitch his tent in a surpassingly beautiful country. The country seats of great people may be wisely placed in the richest scenery that can be found, because great people are constantly moving about from place to place. But rich scenery is apt to become cloying. A house between a fir-wood and a dark heath is much more likely to be a place of permanent pleasure than one placed in the midst of glorious trees and graceful undulations, and fine park-land with superb views. All these are meant to stimulate the mind of the spectator, but they cease to stimulate when we know every point by heart, and see the same splendour every morning before breakfast, and at lunch, and in afternoon rides or walks all the year long. On the whole, a wise man will not leave the city too far away, but will say with the poet:—

“Not wholly in the busy world nor quite  
Beyond it blooms the garden that I love :  
News from the humming city comes to it  
In sound of funeral or of marriage bells ;  
And sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear  
The windy clanging of the minster clock.”

This is much better, for anybody who does not want his mind to go to sleep, than sequestered dells where you get the newspaper two days old, where there are no railways, and where your nearest friend lives a dozen or twenty miles away. Such places are only meant for tourists and farmers.





### XXIII.

#### IMAGINATION AND CONDUCT.

**I**T is a very common mistake to attribute to coldness and badness of heart what is really due to nothing more criminal than an entire want of imagination. People more often rudely disregard the feelings and situation of others from inability to picture with any accuracy what is not immediately and palpably under their own eye, than from a base resolution to pursue their objects at any cost to their friends and neighbours. They have no sympathy with disappointment and wounded affection and all the other similar forms of mental pain, simply because they are themselves unconscious of such sensations, and they have not the faculty which would quicken them into realizing the possibility of this pain in others. They say

and do harsh and unsympathetic things, out of a sheer incapacity to see any but their most direct outside consequences. The immense power of imagination as a moral agent is almost invariably overlooked in the current domestic theories of moral education. Everybody sees how closely it lies about the root of art, how essential it is alike to the composition and the enjoyment of poetry, painting, and, above all, of music; but not everybody has persuaded himself that imagination plays a scarcely less important part in conduct. Take from the character and acts of the best men and women what is due to the operation of the imaginative faculties, and you would have left but few of the highest kind of good motives and fine traits. From this it follows, that the present leaning of educational theories towards a severe repression of the imagination in favour of the purely scientific form of mind is a leaning which is far from having all the arguments on its own side. Scientific training teaches the invaluable habits of testing all statements, and weighing evidence, and preferring truth above all other considerations; but it would be a distinct misfortune if excessive and narrow cultivation of the scientific spirit were to displace the imaginative temper, which is the very source and spring of so many moral excellences. The quick and many-sided sensibility which is the result of a cultivated imagination, as

a thousand instances have proved, is perfectly compatible with the strictest philosophic temper. The aim of man, as an inquirer and in the intellectual order of things, is truth; as a being with social instincts and obligations, his aim is Beneficence and Humanity. It is obvious that neither of these in the least degree clashes with the other. But we can very easily believe that, if schoolmasters were to teach science in the narrow, ungenial, dry-bones fashion in which so many of them now teach ancient literature, the effect on the mind of a student with not more than average natural susceptibility or enthusiasm would be fatally injurious to the health of the imagination, and not less so therefore to social conduct. It will be an exceedingly evil day when little boys and girls are regaled with mathematical puzzles, and experiments with the lever and the pulley, to the detriment of fairy tales and romances. For, although the effect of the highest scientific knowledge is to quicken and expand the imagination, this is not by any means the case when the knowledge is confined to the stiff and apparently arid and inelastic elements. A lad who came away from school with only the same amount of appreciation of science as he commonly has of the classics, would be even more starved than he is now in the imaginative region of his mind.

Considering that the comparative weakness of the

humane sentiments is the chief cause of the most prominent as well as the most deep-seated miseries that prevail throughout the world, and not least of all in our own country, nothing can be more valuable than an idea which sheds any light upon the source of ordinary inhumanity. And this too generally neglected truth that much cruelty and harshness in conduct is the result of defective imagination, has the important practical merit of substituting an accessible for an inaccessible cause. If you attribute a harsh or unfeeling act to innate malevolence or incurable natural coldness of disposition, there is an end of the matter. The harsh person must be left to his miserable fate, and so too must those unfortunate beings who happen to be under his influence or in his power. He is what he is by the visitation of God. But it is of the essence of what has been called Rationalism in all departments of thought to abandon this belief in the secret and unchangeable evil properties of the human heart. We no longer believe that insanity is the consequence of the presence of an evil demon, who has taken bodily possession of its victim. And a rational analysis persuades us in the same way that an austere, unsympathetic, unfeeling disposition is not an absolute and final quality of character into which we need inquire no further; but that, on the contrary, it only implies the presence of a number of unfavourable

mental conditions, the most prominent of which is torpor of imagination. Innate badness of heart you cannot reach. A slumbering faculty of intellect you can reach. If anybody chooses to say, as wicked Caligulas have said, that to inflict torture of body or anguish of mind positively gives him pleasure, you can do nothing with him in the way of argument. The only course with a wretch of this sort is to put the gratification of his monstrous pleasures out of his reach.

But most people who pass for harsh and unfeeling would deny, and with perfect sincerity, that the infliction of pain is other than highly distasteful to them. Their fault is that they do not see or understand the pain which they cause. Children, for instance, are nearly all cruel, and for the reason that they are, from their years, scarcely able to know what cruelty means. Their barbarous tormentings of flies and toads and cats, and most other sentient beings on which they can lay their hands, are only the result of an ignorant sportive-ness. They have no notion of the thrills of agony which their reckless humour sends along the quivering nerves of the victim. Parents too often content themselves with a simple prohibition, either very stern or else very mild and appealing, instead of trying to awaken a vivid consciousness of what these torn flies and mutilated toads endure. Boys and girls desist from these atrocities when they are



old enough to find out for themselves that pain is a bad thing. But, besides the horrors which they inflict on birds and insects, are those with which they torment one another, or rather with which the dull and blunt torment the few among them who are keenly sensitive. In this case they see plainly that they cause pain, but they have no distinct picture of what they are doing. And it is the same with them when they grow up. Persons with blunt sensibilities and sluggish imaginations know that this or that thing is sure to be disagreeable to others, because they can tell the outward signs of pain and mortification. Only, their conception of pain is so dull, and corresponds so imperfectly and scantily with the reality, as to have no restraining power over their conduct.

In all cases of this kind, exhortations to benevolence and considerateness and mercy only fall with a fraction of their due weight. Those to whom they are addressed understand too dimly what you mean by your very terms. They require definition, and the only way of making the definition intelligible is to kindle some flame in the imagination, to impress upon them that their own capacities and susceptibilities are not the measure of the universe, to quicken in them the idea that there are unnumbered fine shades of passion and feeling and sensibility, each of which it is the busi-

ness of the humane to take into account, and make proper allowance for.

Besides this, it is needless to say that there are a hundred other sides of conduct in which imagination plays a powerful though often unobserved part, and to which the imagination lends a characteristic colour. The more this faculty of the mind is quickened and developed, the more distinct the leaning towards what is generous and lofty. Take those thousands of British households where a mistaken and dwarfing conception of religion has invested the bare notion of a richly cultivated imagination with all that is perilous and wicked—where the drama is spoken of as a choice device for ensnaring souls, where pictures are held to be vain gewgaws, novels to be pestilent diversions from the pursuit of salvation, and poetry to be very frivolous and dangerous as soon as it quits the bounds prescribed by the imagination of Dr. Watts. The grey, colourless life which comes of this theory is too well known, and so are the often disastrous rebellions against the theory on the part of its younger victims. The profligacy of the sons of too austere fathers is an old story. Minds with any elasticity or fertility or impulse cannot tolerate these stiff, narrow bounds. They long for an atmosphere of growth and movement, and, as they do not find it in any form of virtue with which they are acquainted, they very commonly seek it

in the more genial shape which vice may present. The powers of imagination which might have been made the very salt of character only serve to hurry the character the more rapidly to degradation. The mental ruin of the profligate is not so very much worse than the mental ruin of the prig, except in the external ruin which the former commonly entails into the bargain. Each loses that happy expansiveness of nature which is one of the traits that make a man's character worth most both to himself and other people, and of which a rich and vigorous imagination is the chief root and source.

It is rather mournful to think how many wretches there are whose only glimpses of these heights of soul are got through the evil agency of gin, whose only moments when such dim glimpses are possible are those when all the rest of the intellect except imagination has been lulled into a fatal slumber. Whether any of these visions of higher possibilities survive the clearing away of the spirituous mist is a question which the wise man will not undertake to decide. With these unfortunate souls, as with other people, the imagination takes some of its colour and bias from outside conditions; but its effect is to make them brighter and more endurable, at least so long as the imagination is at work. Even faint and momentary insights of this sort are better than an unbroken level of sordid

and hideous existence. But when culture and opportunity make the habitual and wise exercise of the imagination possible, there is scarcely anything else so certain to elevate all the springs and impulses of conduct.





## XXIV.

### COLLOQUIAL FALLACIES.



MOST people are disposed to think, in their inmost consciousness, that they can talk well under certain circumstances. Only unfortunately, in the majority of cases, those circumstances which are the fostering nurses of good conversation are never to be found, except in more or less strict privacy. And, after all, a man must be a very poor creature indeed who cannot say things which they of his household, at least, will take to be full of point and brilliance. The "petty tyrant of the fireside" can generally ensure both attention and applause for the oracular wisdom that it is his august pleasure to dispense. When the circle of listeners is enlarged, and family partiality or family servility ceases to work, he may be conscious that he is making no mark, except the mark of the bore.



Still the man reflects that there are different classes of talkers; that there is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon; and that while some men shine brightest in society, there are others whom only an esoteric audience can appreciate or bring out to their best. Then there are others who, finding themselves unable to talk well, or, perhaps, even unable to talk at all among men, recover their own esteem by the conviction that they can talk agreeably and fluently to women. In the discussions of their own sex about books, or politics, or horses, or wine, even though not devoid of knowledge or opinion, they are cursed with a tormenting dumbness that always prevents them from saying anything which is both worth saying in itself, and precisely to the point as well. But among ladies they are unrivalled. They can make way with the very dullest and most unspeakably insipid of these enchanting creatures. At a slow dinner-party, or in the intervals of the dance, they prattle to their partners like a giant rejoicing to run his course. This is their grand arena. Other men may, if they will, discourse powerfully in the House of Commons, or in club bow-windows, or among theologians and scholars. But not for all their triumphs of the tongue would the genuine lady's man exchange his own skill and success. It must be admitted that talking to women is, as a rule, a much more

difficult thing to do than talking to men. The majority alike of men and women are horribly vapid on nearly every subject but some one or two in which their own interests are centred. But women are more vapid than men, because they are not even supposed to feel any interest in most of the things which make the material of good conversation. With a man, one always has the common ground of the newspaper. The dullest of men can generally get fairly hold of the one idea set forth in a leading article, and this gives him a sort of impetus. Ladies, on the other hand, don't even get so much as this. And, in consequence of the conventional restraint put upon all their ideas and chances of acquiring ideas, they do not catch more than half the allusions in which, as distinguished from elaborate statements, good talk always abounds. The allusions have to be explained, with the same effect as decanting soda-water. Remembering all this, we are bound to confess that the pride of the man who can talk well to ladies is not unjust or exaggerated. The knack of making bricks without straw, of being able to go on talking about absolutely nothing, is one of the most admirable of social gifts. Perhaps, in the case of young ladies, at any rate, the boundary line between agreeable talk and adroit flirtation is not very accurately marked. A little spice of flirtation is a wonderful improvement to

talk in the eyes of the average young lady of common life.

The most spurious, as well as the most pretentious kind of good talker is the man who talks magazines. If anybody chooses to give his mind to it, this is a very easy road to a certain sort of conversational success—a fact which may account for its comparative popularity. It is an especially favourite method among college dons. The author of the ‘Student’s Manual,’ or somebody of the same stamp, assures every young man that, if he will only read five verses of the Greek Testament each morning after breakfast all through life, he will retain his hold at once on the niceties of the Greek tongue and on the verities of the Christian faith. On something like the same principle, a conversational don believes that half an hour spent religiously every afternoon in the magazine-room of the Union will eventually make a man the most successful talker of his age. Of course it is not enough to run your eye over the popular English magazines. All the world does this. It is in some of the French and German, and even American periodicals, that the finest veins are to be discovered. Here the ingenious and industrious explorer constantly “strikes ile,” and of the very best quality. Foreign periodicals abound much more freely than our own in new views, astounding interpretations, outrageous rehabilitations, and

overwhelming hypotheses. To advance one of these, with a few of what the author took for proofs and arguments, may establish a reputation for a whole evening. But then the process must be conducted with judgment. The subject has to be easily brought up, though some masters of this art prefer the bolder method of seizing an early pause in the conversation, and at once launching forth into the middle of things. It is very desirable, if possible, that the subject should be one of which the listeners know a little, but not too much. They are thus tempted to offer bits of criticism, which the conversationalist, having got up his theme, demolishes in a most masterly manner. Of course, all this must be done gracefully and without assumption. The art of dissembling your art is as requisite in conversation as in anything else, and it is as useful in artificial as in really good conversation. But in spite of its temporary success, talk, which is the result of special cram, has no place in the true art. Men who cram themselves for talking purposes are like women who resort to the rouge-pot, and wear false hair. Both painted women and crammed men may be very pleasant people in their way. Society, perhaps, could not get on without them; and it is a great blunder to fly into a passion with the vanity which prompts a recourse to false pretences. Still, men who habitually let off magazine articles over

wine, or in walks with their friends, should learn that they are not true talkers, any more than a copyist is an artist, or a translator of books a creative author.

A small class of men of a polemic turn of mind mistake disputation and argument for talk. They do not care for any conversation which does not somehow or other develop an issue, a position which is open to more than one view. A good talk to them is pretty nearly synonymous with a hot and close argumentation. They are like those mythical Americans who go through the world as roaring lions, seeking free fights. People, in their view, only meet for the sharp encounter of native wits. The quiet, easy flow of talk is a tame, dull waste of precious time, that ought to have been spent in assertion and replication, in rejoinder and rebutter and surrebutter, in quick clenching and rapid refutation. A couple of people of this disputatious temper may prove as outrageous a nuisance as the most pompous conversational autocrat that ever lived and talked. It is highly proper to be anxious for truth. If you hear anybody say the thing that is not, or that in your opinion is not, and if you have a short and decisive confutation easily within reach, then it is well to lay on, and not to spare. But a sustained duel is a sheer vexation to calm overlookers. Instead of trusting that right may win, they sigh in vain for the de-



scent of some just angel, who should inflict upon the disputants the fate of the Kilkenny' cats. As De Quincy says, in speaking of Dr. Parr's rudenesses in this direction, "mere good sense is sufficient, without any experience at all of high life, to point out the intolerable absurdity of allowing two angry champions to lock up and sequester, as it were, the whole sociable enjoyment of a large party, and compel them to sit, 'in sad civility,' witnesses of a contest which can interest the majority neither by its final object nor its management."

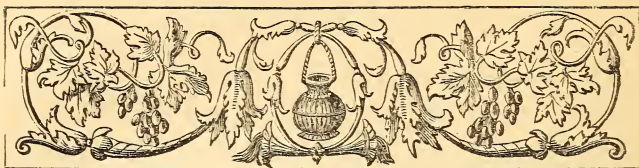
Now and then, it is true, one meets a fool so hollow and so pretentious that it is impossible to resist the temptation of having a throw with him. But even in such a case as this, the execution ought to be swift and certain. If you can impose absolute silence on your fool, it may be worth while to spend a little time and trouble in dispatching him. But if he be one of those lively fools who can skip to and fro with the celebrity and heartiness of that ignoble but tormenting insect which can leap a hundred times the length of its own body, who is no sooner expelled from one corner than he has entrenched himself in another, then it is much the better plan to leave him to disport at his ease. And though an encounter between a blockhead and a philosopher may, under certain conditions, be amusing and

useful, an encounter between two philosophers in society is a distinct absurdity.

There is a peculiar form of the affectation of good talk, especially prevalent in our own time. If one were engaged in classifying the popular fallacies about colloquial excellence, this might be called the Dark Lantern Fallacy. It consists in suddenly shooting down upon the conversation with a sharp explosive sentence, which is uttered in a couple of seconds, but whose influence upon the talkers is much more enduring. This is very useful at times. To let a ray of light into a discussion by a keen paradox may be to do excellent service. But paradox may readily be carried too far. The knack is easily acquired, and this is in itself a presumption against it. The youngest undergraduate is nowadays often master of the art of saying these pungent, half-true, and wholly exaggerated things. The prime secret of the art consists in being entirely without reverence. Of the men who have won reputations by these trenchant, far-shooting interpolations in talk, the most have earned their laurels by the simple trick of bringing something that most people look upon with respect or awe into juxtaposition with something else that is ludicrous and petty. This is amusing enough as far as it goes. The Philistines and reverential folks have so much of their own way in the world, that the occasional epigram

which tempers their despotism cannot be anything but welcome. The worst of it is that the applause which rewards the man who suddenly lets out a keen ray, and then shuts his light up, lying subtly in wait for his next chance, is very likely to make him think a great deal better of himself than he is at all justified in doing. For six epigrams in an evening do not make a good talker. And men, or rather lads, of this stamp—for men find the comparative worthlessness of the knack—are apt to forget the difference between a keen epigram, a vigorous antithesis, or a hissing paradox, on the one hand, and mere pertness and flippancy on the other. It would take a very long time to classify all the varieties of good talk, elevated or merely colloquial. Dr. Johnson was a good talker in one way, and Coleridge in another. Their styles are wide as the poles asunder. But each has characteristic merit in his style, and between them lie all sorts of shades and degrees. A man ought to be quite catholic in his views about good conversation. Only this does not prevent him from seeing that in society there is a great deal of dull, stupid, or pert mimicry of talk. Against display of vanity in this shape everybody should earnestly set his face. It is one of the most annoying of the minor social sins.





## XXV.

### NEW FRIENDS.



HERE are very few things pleasanter than the sensation of awakening to find that one has got a new friend. We may retire any night with the consciousness of having been introduced to people whom we did not know before, of having had a day's pleasant chat with them, and with the anticipation of many more such chats in days to come. But nobody would dream of wasting the name of friend on acquaintances of this stamp, whose hold and establishment in our affections may perhaps be described by saying, that they are persons whom we should be very glad to have for railway companions in the journey down to Manchester or to Edinburgh, or whom we should like to sit next to at a dinner-party, or to have staying with us at a country-house. The mild Rochefoucauld of com-

mon life assures you that after the "first sprightly running" of life has ceased, you need not expect to find amid the dregs of your years any acquaintances who are more than this; nay, that you are exceptionally lucky in meeting with new persons who can even do so much as make a long journey in a railway carriage agreeable to you. And, of course, if the person thus solemnly warned is an exhausted wretch who has thrown away broadcast all the resources of life, instead of tending and hoarding them, and finds himself unable alike to feel his old joys or to adopt new ones, then the counsellings of the disbeliever in new friendships are as sound as any other. Also, if the man is of a temperament which has never at any time warmed with the emotions of the friend, he may very well be more than content if he only happens to fall in with agreeable acquaintances. It is of no use to argue about the more or less of light and colour with the blind, and a man who has never had old friends is not likely to understand the delight of discovering a new one. To be able to appreciate this he must have felt the solid truth of the good old commonplace about friendship, that it halves every pain and doubles every pleasure. Moody beings whose narrow and confined souls have kept both their joys and their pains to themselves are consistently as indifferent to the chance of a new friend as they would be to the chance of having shown to them a new land-



scape, if they had no taste for natural scenery. Still they may justly envy their more fortunate fellow-creatures who have this capacity for liking other people, and for inspiring a corresponding liking.

It is no small thing, obviously, to find that, with no exertion of one's own, all our good possessions have been doubled, and all our skeletons robbed of half their grimness, or half the ghosts that haunted us finally laid. Not that in this is involved the categorical enumeration either of all one's joys or all one's grievances. It is too often supposed by the blockheads who enter so painfully into the composition of society, that a friend is a person whom you may expect to give ear to long histories of your own private affairs without being bored, as he would be if he were not your friend. Considering that the number of people with a strong relish for being bored is naturally limited, it is not surprising that those who hold this theory are sceptical whether there be any new friends or not. They do not see that it is in the consciousness of an occult sympathy that the charm and consolation of friendship resides, not in being a more privileged and more intimate kind of gossip. In the most delicate kinds of friendship, a man or a woman, who thinks about it at all, cannot help feeling as Aladdin may have felt when, after accidentally rubbing the magician's ring, he first saw the ge-

nus of the ring appear, or when the genius of the lamp brought him delicious meats in golden vessels. There is an air of magic in the sudden perfection with which it is found that a whole set of new sympathies have sprung up, and a whole body of new pleasures been added to the old stock.

For the wise man knows that no effort is of itself enough to procure the gift. These affinities will not come by any amount of mere taking thought. Can anybody write out in form the various reasons which make him prefer one man or one woman to all, or even to some, other men and women? The land that lies between love and aversion is broad enough, though it may sometimes be traversed with astounding swiftness. But it is not always easy, and in cases of very strong likings is scarcely ever possible, to explain why we stand to a given person in one attitude rather than the other. Of course a moralist with a character to keep up will lay you down a completely satisfactory and exhaustive account of all the considerations which enter into just liking and disliking. You will never allow yourself, he is confident, to feel my affection or kindness for anybody into whose moral principles and theologic belief you have not previously made a searching inquiry. Having ascertained that he pays his debts, goes to the right kind of church, never smokes, and talks deferentially of people in high places, then you may safely

let the torrent of your affections burst forth with all the impetuosity which so excellent a character is so admirably qualified to provoke. And similarly in the formation of friendships with women. If they confine themselves to the most correct sentiments, and behave with that frigidity which is so truly gratifying to every well-regulated male mind, they are probably worthy of the rich and exuberant gifts of a well-regulated male friendship. But, to speak with respectful candour of the moralist, he barely covers the whole length and breadth of the matter. Unknown quantities of a force and magnitude which cannot be measured enter into his theoretically unimpeachable formula. There are tones of voice, and lights in the eye, and unconscious tricks of gait and movement, and expressions flitting across the face, which may have as much to do with one's kindness for a man or a woman, as the profoundest belief in the soundness of their principles or the unshaken consistency of their practice.

The same undue predominance which is thus given to Pharisaic goodness is also, and even more frequently, given to intellectual cleverness. How often are we told that we are quite sure to be good friends with somebody, because he or she is so amazingly clever? The breakdown of cleverness as a basis of friendship is even more conspicuous than that of goodness. In an ordinary way it

alienates far more than it reconciles. And there are curious diversities of opinion as to what constitutes cleverness. As a rule, when one is told to expect to find a promised acquaintance very clever, it is safe to prepare for a flippant and impudent ignoramus. This is more likely than not to be the case, and if it proves otherwise the surprise is by so much the more agreeable. If it is a lady who is thus spoken of, the alternative is generally between being dull and conceited, and being pert and conceited. But even the genuine possession of the qualities which are vaguely summed up in this word is notoriously no guarantee for the twenty other qualities, definable or not, which enter into the composition of a friend.

There is a common trick of fancying that it is impossible for a man to find a new friend without being more or less inconstant to his old ones. And there is a certain kind of thin-natured people whose conduct lends countenance to such a notion—people who are ever ready to set up a new idol, ceasing at the same time to pay further deference to the idols whom they have set up previously. For instance, if you are arguing, they will almost ostentatiously take the side of the new-comer against their former ally. If you are travelling together, they will seize any opportunity that offers of making friends with a stranger, and, in a manner, snubbing you in his favour. If their opinion is

sought to decide a dispute between you and somebody else, the chances are ten to one that their candid sense of justice will impel them to give their verdict against you. There are few of the petty basenesses of life for which so little excuse can be made, or which are so thoroughly hateful, as this practice of habitually deserting the old for the new, simply because it is new.

But a shifty and disinterested parasitism may be left out of sight when we are talking about friendship, with which it has nothing in common except a measure of outward seeming. If caprice and a rooted habit of unfaithfulness are not to be fairly charged against everybody who now and again expands the circle of his friends, no more can it be admitted that "what makes us like new acquaintances is not so much our weariness of the old, or the mere pleasure of change, as spleen at not being sufficiently admired by those who know us too well, and the hope of being more admired by those who know us less." In this, as in every other maxim from the same source, there is a keen truthfulness, if we only look to the worse side of human nature. Confined to the people in whom this is the most powerful side, the aphorism is most likely as correct an account of motives as we can have. If we are talking of a man penetrated with vanity, or of any other man so far as he is vain, a new friend may mean to him only a fresh



admirer and flatterer. But if we look to the other side of human nature—to men and women, that is, in whom egotism has not ridden roughshod over all the different virtues which together confer on people the sense of there being a very extensive universe outside of themselves—it is easy to see that a love of admiration has nothing to do with a new friend. He is valued, not as a minister to our own self-love, but because he has something that commands our admiration and service. It may be said that this is only what ought to be, while Rochefoucauld represents what actually is. And we will confess that to anybody who says this there is no answer, only it may be added that nobody who says it deserves any answer. In all the finest and truest friendships of which there is any record, the prime element has been some sentiment more or less like reverence, and yet more or less distinct from it. It is reverence without distance, consciousness of one's own partial inferiority without abasement, the tender fidelity of the votary without the mechanical deference of the professing disciple. The measures and proportions vary infinitely, still at bottom there always lies the conviction that your friend has some virtue or some grace of character which you are without, though not apathetic about. This may seem a hard saying, but only to those who confound friendship with familiarity, or with one of those half-accidental

intimacies which are so often mistaken for friendship until an accident happens to reveal the blunder. It is natural that, as life advances, the willingness to recognise the value of anything that we have missed should at all events not increase, because the opportunities of repairing the lack have practically vanished. But the later we can prolong that flexibility and openness of spirit which welcomes new friends without disparaging old ones, the more likely shall we be to postpone the drawing nigh of the evil days, and the years when men say there is no pleasure in them.

Friendship between men and women is nearly always a growth of later life, for the obvious reason that in the earlier days of passion any amicable relation at all, except between brothers and sisters or those who have grown up from childhood together, is at all events strongly tinged with warmer hues than those of mere friendship. Yet, of all forms of the relation of which we have been talking, this is perhaps the most delightful. It is possible for a man to love his wife with due fervour, and still to find in some other woman the qualities which he seeks in a friend. The friendship between Madame Swetchine and De Tocqueville was only one out of a score of scarcely less notable alliances of this pure and elevated kind, though curiously enough they are most of them to be found among illustrious French people. The

most charming of the Queen Anne essayists declares that "if you examine the bottom of your esteem for a woman, you will find that you have a greater opinion of her beauty than anybody else." There is no harm in this pleasant delusion, if it be one; but not even imaginary beauty is essential in such cases. It does not lie at the root of the matter. The sort of woman whom a man makes his friend is, like Mrs. Colonel Poyntz, "masculine in a womanly way." When the grace, the vivacity, the keen power of taking interest, characteristic of all fine-natured women, are deepened by a culture which unfortunately only a few women give themselves, a character is formed in which every vigorous-minded person may find all that is most delicious and most valuable in friendship. He is very lucky who has the chance of securing an influence of this sort; and as such a chance, from the nature of things, seldom offers itself to a very young man or a very young woman, here, if nowhere else, is a good reason why people should be slow to seal up the roll of their friends.





## XXVI.

### SINS AGAINST HEALTH.



HERE are a good many reasons which may help to explain what is, at first sight, the extraordinary fact that bodily health is only just coming to take a first place among the objects of a reasonable man's interest. Of course the methods of healing sickness have always attracted a large measure of attention, because downright sickness is disabling in a way that is too plain and irresistible to be overlooked. Everybody will do his best to get rid of pain when it is on him. But the conception of health as something much more than the mere absence of a prostrating or unmistakably disagreeable malady is considerably slower in making way. When somebody talked about health being "the state in which existence itself is felt to be an enjoyment, in which all simple and

natural pleasures are appreciated, and the little every-day anxieties of our business sit lightly upon us," his definition seemed a mere commonplace truism. Nobody could reasonably maintain that health is anything short of this. But there are uncommonly few people who could pretend that, in practice, they make the attainment of this blessed state such an object as they unquestionably would if they fully realized its blessedness. Theoretically, we pray for health as the best gift which the gods have to bestow ; but when the matter is left in our own hands, there are a hundred other goods which we never hesitate about silently preferring.

It is rather startling to think how few persons one knows who do not habitually sacrifice health for some other advantage confessedly less worth having. And not the least startling thing is that the few who have the sense to make health really their first aim are not seldom the dullest blockheads in the choice of all other aims. At the Universities, for example, and among the best sets of young men in London and other large cities, the men of muscle are not commonly the men of brain. There are more exceptions than there used to be, it is true ; but the hard-reading man, as a rule, still too generally contents himself with that miserable and delusive form of exercise, a constitutional. London is supposed to be the



centre of intellect, and if we wish for a measure of the space which thought for the body occupies among us, it may be found in the pitiful provision made for gymnastic exercises in the metropolis. With the exception of one or two comparatively small private establishments (and those expensive) and the German rooms, there is nothing. Half-a-dozen of such halls as that which Mr. Maclaren superintends at Oxford would make London a perfect sanatorium for the hard-worked mortals who are compelled to live there the greater part of the year. It is a wonder that the idea has never occurred to one of those ingenious beings who make it their business to promote companies. If one or two fine gymnasiums, well fitted up, and with competent superintendents, were established in convenient situations, the shareholders could not fail to get a decent dividend, and they would earn the blessings of mankind into the bargain. The promoter may reasonably express his indifference to the latter, but, as leading to the former, they are not without their value. A gymnasium is neither the pleasantest nor the most effective form of taking exercise, but, unluckily, everybody cannot afford to keep a horse. The persistence with which doctors urge horse-exercise is, to the majority, as absurd as the persistence with which they recommend plenty of old port or sound dry sherry, together with good living, to paupers. Those who

cannot ride must walk, as the saying is ; and those who find walking, for its own sake, very dull and mechanical, and in all respects the very reverse of refreshing, ought to be able to go to a gymnasium if this were really the best of all possible worlds.

But the scantiness of gymnasiums is not the only symptom that men are more ready to talk than to act as if health were the prime good. Gymnastics are not the only form of exercise, and exercise is not the only condition—perhaps not in all respects the most important condition—of health. The way in which people eat and drink has as much as anything else to do with the sense of freedom and elasticity in all their faculties. The prevalent recklessness in this respect is amazing beyond description. We dine at one hour one day, and another the next ; or we take a hearty meal immediately after rising from a hard day's work, or immediately before going to bed ; or, like Wellington when he dined with Cambacères, we don't care what we eat, and take anything which a flippant-minded cook chooses to serve. As somebody has said, melted butter is the bane of English society, and melted butter is only a type of other popular poisons. There are persons, we believe, who eat pork. And an ingenious writer has recently suggested that people who cannot afford to give stylish dinner-parties should ask their friends to supper ; that is to say, you should

ask your friend to take at nine or half-past a quantity of food which will not be digested much before two or three in the morning, and, if he goes to sleep meanwhile, will probably never be digested at all. Men, in other respects in their senses, have been heard to declare that they would as soon drink bad wine as good. There is no end to the barbarous eccentricities which we permit ourselves in the matter of diet. The spectacle of an ordinary dinner-party, with its admixture of rich meats and various wines, is a sufficiently familiar instance. And there are people who readily admit all about health being "that state in which existence itself is felt to be an enjoyment, and the little anxieties of our businesses sit lightly upon us," and who value it accordingly in theory, and yet who are charmed with that most astounding invention of modern civilization, a fish-dinner at Greenwich or Blackwall. Mr. Herbert Spencer has said, and with obvious justice, that attention to health is a moral duty. It is a duty, too, which one finds an immediate reward in observing. The reward of being charitable or industrious is not, under all circumstances, direct and palpable; but a man who abstains from what he knows will make him feel cloudy or uncomfortable, or prevent him from working as he wishes to do, gets his *quid pro quo* in a prompt and undeniable shape.

Excessive brain-work is probably the side on

which some of the most useful men sin most recklessly. Exercise and regularity and care about food may counterbalance the mischief up to a certain point, but the fuel can never be supplied with a rapidity and certainty proportionate to the consumption. The long lives of the judges are commonly held up as a proof that the hardest work is not inconsistent with health. But it is worth while to consider that, though a judge works a good deal, it is not all work which taxes his mind very severely. It is not like the work of an original author, for instance. The judge sits a great many hours of every year in a court, but his mind is not keenly on the stretch throughout the whole of every case, perhaps not even of the majority of cases. And, in the second place, a judge always has an enormously long rest once a year. The vacation is long enough to permit a thorough renovation, and this is the great thing. Every holiday is so far an advantage; but there can be no doubt that one prolonged change of occupation and surrounding is of a better kind than a number of short changes, not one of which is sufficient to allow the system entirely to recover. It is a mistake, therefore, to argue from the example of the Bench that a man may work his brain eight or ten hours a day, most days in the year, without seriously impairing his health. Yet men of all sorts and conditions are constantly attempting this impos-

sible feat. Men of business and politicians and students and journalists all supply instances of the fatal sin of the time. It takes so long to rid the mind of an old habit of looking at things.

And, as we began by saying, the idea that it is unworthy to care about the body has more than one root. First, there is the Puritanic misinterpretation of the Gospel injunction that we are to take no heed for the body. For a being with an immortal spirit to save to trouble himself about its perishable case was thought preposterous. To feel any concern whether your skin is clean or foul, whether your muscles are braced or flaccid, whether your nerves are in good order, whether your lungs and heart play freely and healthily, all this has been deemed a sign of a carnal and worldly spirit. John Knox would perhaps have denounced a gymnasium as bitterly as a mass-house.

Then, among others whom theological considerations are not likely to influence, the spirit of philosophic asceticism has had weight. The body must be mortified and neglected, so that the understanding may be clearer and more entirely disengaged. Just as the Puritan considered every moment given to the body as so much subtracted from the chances of the soul, the intellectual ascetic views every moment given to the body as so much reading and thinking and writing lost to the individual and the world. One of the



old students, like Bayle, for example, would have thought gymnastics or riding not a bit less frivolous than dancing minuets. And this ascetic spirit survives into unscholastic days. Not a few hide-bound old merchants would even now, in their hearts, place a gymnasium scarcely one degree above a casino. Lord Stanley's admission that at Liverpool many of the young clerks who use the gymnasium there "take to these exercises with an enthusiasm that is quite remarkable," will be a good text for the pleasant persons who think that a clerk should go home at night and read Political Economy or the History of Commerce till bed-time. It is an immense comfort to think that this particular class of fools, at all events, is rapidly on the decrease.

But then there are other influences at work which may create a force almost equally hostile to the rational view. The desire to be rich at all cost, or to be famous, or to rise to the top of a profession, is just as likely to make a man inattentive to the claims of his body as the old conviction that it is wicked to feel any concern about it. A politician recently declared that the man with a quick brain and an excitable nervous system, but with a feeble and badly-developed frame, is as unsatisfactory a result of anything pretending to be a system, as a navy or a ploughman, who has run all to muscle and kept no brain. Wher-

ever there is room for deliberate choice—that is, wherever a man is born with a fair constitution which foolish parents have not ruined—this is not at all too strong a judgment. And all growing opinion is in this direction. “If it were possible,” it has been said, “to trace the history of families in detail, we should be startled to find how many of those engaged in purely sedentary pursuits die out, and how the gaps have to be filled up, year after year, from the hardier rural population.” The constant evidence of this, and of the other evils which can only be hinted at as resulting from continual sedentariness, will help and fit in with the wise philosophy which teaches that a human being should develop himself all round; and that anybody who neglects his bodily health is just as much shirking his moral obligations as if he took no care of his money or his intellect or anything else which can conduce to his happiness. For one reason, if for no other, a man is morally bound to seek vigorous health. A feeble and sickly father is most likely to have a feeble and sickly progeny; and, even if he likes being feeble himself, one cannot imagine anything more wicked than entailing, by carelessness and folly, the curse of ill-health on the next generation.

And the same consideration may set people reflecting whether a gymnasium is not equally desirable for women. The increased health and

vigour of a woman who takes moderate and suitable gymnastic exercise are well known to the gymnastic teachers who have had female pupils. Of course the notion is one at which fools grin. It is not familiar; and, with respect to ideas, it is novelty, and not familiarity, which breeds contempt. But it is not too much to say that three-fourths of the lethargy and weariness of which men complain in women, and of which women themselves are much more bitterly sensible than men, are due to their entire abstention in a general way from anything like active exercise. Physiologists explain why this is the case. Family doctors harangue about it, and insist upon exercise. And the form in which their prescription is carried out is a lounge three or four times round the gardens of the Square. It is strongly to be hoped that, when women get their "rights," the first use to which they put them will be to erect gymnasiums for themselves. Perhaps they might do it with advantage, even without waiting for their rights.





## XXVII.

### MIDDLE-CLASS MORALITY.

**R**ECENT transactions in the middle-class world furnish a striking and exceedingly unpleasant comment upon that public morality of which the Briton talks so loudly and confidently. Take, for instance, those dishonourable conspiracies on the London Stock Exchange against the stock of a given bank or of a given railway company. Or take the conduct of those who are implicated in the London, Chatham, and Dover disclosures ; for though there may be a dispute as to the guilty persons, there is no dispute possible as to the fact that somebody or other has been tricky, mendacious, and fraudulent. Or take the unpatriotic misdemeanours of the rich tradesmen, from Manchester and elsewhere, who went about scattering the wages of their own and other people's corrup-

tion in rotten boroughs. We can no longer settle all public iniquities by depositing them at the door of a bloated and effete aristocracy. And if we allow ourselves to go on calling the middle-class the great backbone of the country—a position which is supposed to follow from the bloatedness of the aristocracy—it must at least be admitted that a good many of the vertebræ are in an uncommonly shaky and decayed condition.

After all, the great pursuit of the English middle-class is the search after money, and, next to this, the search after position. The average member of the middle-class first wants to be very rich, and then he wants to know lords. Traditional morality may keep men with these designs straight for a certain time, perhaps for a generation or so; but at length the tradition grows weaker, while the desires have been growing stronger. There are, we know, plenty of people eager to be rich, who would not on any account soil their hands with shabby or questionable dealings in quest of riches. There are plenty of people, too, hungering and thirsting after an opportunity of getting a lord to dine with them, and yet who would not for the world cheat or swindle. That is, a man may be a flunkey and a snob without being a rogue as well. Only the tendency of one or two very strong and very mean desires is to produce a thoroughly mean character, and anything which wears away a man's



self-respect at one point is most likely to infect it all round. The fact of seeking an elevated end disables one from having recourse to ignoble means. And, for the same reason, a man who is capable of habitually thinking of sordid and sorry ends is in a way to become capable of adopting unworthy and discreditable means to secure them.

Moralists have talked a great deal of nonsense in their time, and when they enjoin upon us all the virtues that belong to contented poverty they teach what is absolutely mischievous as well as nonsensical. If nobody wanted to be rich, nobody in our present stage of society would be industrious or thrifty, nobody would employ labour, nobody would have any interest in acquiring skill, or in making the best of it when it was acquired. We should be content, as our remote ancestors were, with roots and nuts. The windy sentimentalists who rave against the fundamental postulate of political economy forget all this. But the moralists are clearly right when they say that the *tendency* of the desire for riches, as an end in itself, is unfavourable to refinement or elevation of character. This is a commonplace which needs neither new proof nor fresh illustration. Still, like a hundred other commonplaces, it is allowed to rest on its laurels, and is placed in the dim and drowsy limbo of admitted truths. We concede without an argument, in the first place, that the hunt after wealth

tends to weaken character in certain very delicate and vital points ; and, in the next, that most members of the middle-class are engaging in this perilous hunt with rapidly increasing activity. Yet everybody professes to be very much shocked and surprised when it appears from time to time that a great many of the leading men in commerce, the men who are types of what their neighbours are aspiring to be, pass through a hundred dirty bits of business in a twelvemonth, and think nothing the worse of themselves on this account.

That people should be shocked at this is natural, because the traditions of a more honourable time still survive in sufficient strength to make dishonourable conduct unpleasant in our nostrils. But the surprise is quite unjustifiable. How can you expect commerce of itself to be an education in refined and elevated morality ? This kind of morality is the product of one of two conditions—either of a profound and genuine religious sentiment, or else of a high culture. Nobody, we believe, would be disposed to go to the Exchange for either one or the other. There are cultivated men and religious men to be found there, very likely, but they are a tiny minority. The chief education of the commercial man is commerce itself. The young men who reach Manchester with two shillings and sixpence, and then in twenty years are rich enough to buy boroughs on strictly liberal and

patriotic principles—what culture can they have? They may buy up all the pictures that they can lay their hands upon, and it is certainly very much better that they should buy pictures than that they should spend their money in buying voters. But pictures in big and staring frames do not make up culture. They make a fashionable and costly furniture for a room, like sideboards and mirrors, but they do not give the man who owns them ideas as to his social duty. A taste for handsome furniture is quite compatible with the easiest and loosest public morality in the world, with the most hopeless paucity of ideas, with the darkest ignorance of all that has been done and thought and felt in the great world of past and present that lies outside the Exchange doors.

But the education of life, it is asked, is that to count for nothing? Is it not far more wide, impressive, and enduring than any that can be got from dead printed pages? This attitude towards learning was the natural result of a just reaction against the tyranny of pedants and bookworms, but the time for assuming it has fully passed away. It is no longer necessary, in order to put down the despotism of professors, to maintain that buying and selling, eating and drinking, manufacturing and higgling and haggling, constitute all the education in ideas that any reasonable man can desire, and that is good and wholesome for him. And

the moment that the necessity for repressing arid schoolmasters had ceased, such talk ought to cease also. We see every day what the education of life, ungrounded on other education, does for crowds of merchants and contractors and shopkeepers. Their contempt for ideas, being measured by their ignorance of them, is enormous and profound. They look upon disinterestedness as the dream of sentimental novelists. A man who would sacrifice a thousand a year for a theoretic principle is a fool who will justly end his days in the lunatic department of a workhouse. A poet is a person who writes for young ladies, and manufactures ornaments for the drawing-room table. A painter is a person who manufactures ornaments for the dining-room walls. Historians, biographers, and essayists are over-rated and over-paid people who supplement the work of the cabinet-maker who supplied the bookcase. Is it wonderful that men for whom the education of life has done this should see no harm, but rather the reverse, in a sharp trick, in a clever misrepresentation, in the nearness of a shave against an indictable fraud?

It need not be said that people may have the loftiest moral character without being the most cultivated intellectually. You may find an old Scotch peasant animated by all but the very highest emotions, and filled with delicacy and elevation and refinement. Still, this is mainly because

he is educated, and because the system of his country makes him familiar with Hebrew history and morality and ideas. Looking at Scriptural training apart from its strictly religious side, it gives a peasant, who has had a fair elementary education to begin with, poetry and philosophy and history all in one. The English trader is too often a great deal too busy making haste to be rich even to think of the history and philosophy and poetry which he may hear, and does hear, any Sunday before the sermon begins. Much less has he time or freedom of spirit for a search after ideas. And though, as we have just said, a man may have very high principles of conduct without much book-learning, this scarcely affects the fact which all experience teaches, that the highest conduct is the fruit of the character that has been most raised by wise intellectual culture. In the present conditions of English life, the inordinateness of the desire to make money, or to get on in some other mean way, makes more irreparable the divorce between the practical classes and theoretic teachings. Of course we are speaking of classes and tendencies, apart from remarkable and solitary exceptions in individual cases.

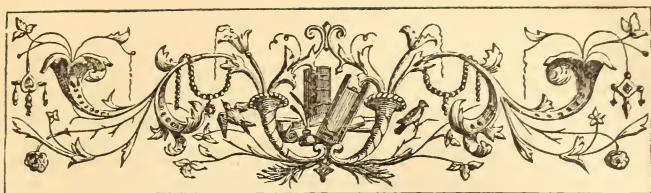
Whence comes it, for instance, that the number of students at Oxford and Cambridge remains comparatively stationary, while the wealth of the middle-classes has been increasing in such gigantic proportions? The Universities themselves abound



in defects and excesses, in sins of omission and sins of commission, and are capable of vast improvement in what they omit to teach, in what they do teach, and in the spirit in which they teach. But this alone is very far from accounting for the comparative apathy with which the opulent middle-class regards University education. This apathy is only a type of their feeling towards all the higher education. It is said, indeed, that tradesmen do not send their sons to college because college training hinders the promotion of practical business habits. If this be so, the tradesmen must be great blockheads, or else they would scarcely overlook the numbers of cases in which an old firm has been lifted out of the rut and carried on to splendid prosperity by some son who has taken a double-first at Oxford, or been a wrangler at Cambridge. The real argument on which the trader relies in his own mind is that education means loss of time, and that loss of time means loss of money, and that this means loss of the one thing that is worth living for. The consequence of all this is a lowering of tone among the middle class, and an increased readiness to apply the maxim that all's fair in love and war to the getting of cash.

An educated man may be a swindler, or may at least stoop to shabby and low transactions, but he is all the less likely to do this for being educated. People once argued against popular education that

it would make the offence of forgery easier, and therefore more common. They forget that it would make people less disposed to commit the offence, though it would make them cleverer at handwriting. A double-first classman might cheat a railway company, or join a Stock-Exchange conspiracy, or bribe a voter; but then he would perhaps have deliberately forged, or even committed a murder, if he had not been a double-first. We are not saying that all commercial people should go to Oxford, or that they would be elevated to perfection if they did. Only they ought to make education in principles and ideas the first thing, and the art of accumulating masses of cash the second. There is not much visible prospect of their doing this, and consequently there is every prospect of commercial shabbiness and dishonesty and unscrupulousness increasing apace. The influence of the traditions of honour has been weakened, so has that of religious feeling, and neither has been generally replaced by anything better than a partial and fluctuating belief in the copy-book legend that honesty is the best policy,—honesty of course being an elastic phrase, to be interpreted according to circumstances. Until culture has come in to fill the moral gap, the English middle-class will continue to supply more people with low aims than is good for its fame; for people with low aims can scarcely be elevated in their choice of means.



## XXVIII.

### LORD CHESTERFIELD'S LETTERS.

**I**N all states of society there has been a more or less wide gulf between the man of the world's theory of the right conduct of life, and that of the schoolmaster, the moralist, and the professor. It would be paying the latter class a compliment which they by no means deserve to say that the principles of happiness have advanced in proportion as this gulf has been narrowed by the encroachments of the pedagogic spirit. The besetting sin of the moralist is contempt for flesh and blood, want of sympathy with *all* the elements of human nature ; and it is really a question whether his excessive exactions have not done more injury by revolting people, especially young people, than his precepts have done good by directing and en-

couraging them. For an intemperate and unsympathetic moral professor does harm in both directions. Those of his hearers with whom he is most successful grow narrow, acrid, and hard. Those on whose minds he is able to exert least of the influence to which he aspires rush off, by force of inevitable reaction, into unrestrained libertinism of one kind or another.

Thus two extreme varieties of evil principle and practice are bred up, and thrown into the world to spread themselves. There is a right instinct in the general popularity of the scapegrace, as well as in the questionable affection commonly felt for the good boy. Although, on the other hand, the man of the world at his best is free from this unsympathetic temper which is the too common mark of the moral professor, he has very obvious faults of his own, and one above all others. Just as the moralist's characteristic defect is want of broad sympathy, so the man of the world's characteristic defect is want of elevation. The first makes no allowance for human weaknesses, the other has no idea of human strength. The one is too ready to talk about falling, the other too slow to think of rising. The one thinks the world a great deal worse, and the other thinks it a great deal better, than it really is. But both the dogmatic moralist and the man of the world fall equally short of a just measure of the com-

plex tidal forces which underlie human actions and aspirations, and promote the ceaseless movement and growth of human character. Each is too contented with producing a smooth and presentable surface of character in anybody whom they have to train, though of course the degree of presentableness is estimated by very different standards.

Men of the world do not often take the trouble to write books about education. Literary composition is too irksome, and its success too doubtful. As it happens, however, the famous Letters of Lord Chesterfield to his Son constitute to some extent a man of the world's manual of education and conduct. We say to some extent, because there is an altogether unreasonable insisting upon graces and airs and fine manners which does not represent the writer's notion of the space which these things should fill in education generally, but is due to the accident that this was the side on which young Stanhope was especially weak. The person to whom they were addressed was a boor. His address was awkward and uncouth, and he was too indifferent to the impression which he made on other people. His father therefore is never weary of expatiating on the importance of *les manières nobles, l'air noble, les grâces*. As Earl Stanhope says, "Had he found his son, on the contrary, a graceful but superficial trifler, his let-



ters would no doubt have urged with equal zeal how vain are all accomplishments when not supported by sterling information." The writer himself, it may be remembered, declares that he would only covet the epithet of well-bred *next* to that of Aristides. And though Chesterfield was no Aristides, he was no fop either. He was one of the two or three really wise and just viceroys whom England has given to Ireland, and he has the distinction, along with Lord Macclesfield, of having rescued the English Calendar from the barbarous isolation and confusion of the Old Style. Chesterfield was not a man of the world in the sense in which Major Pendennis was a man of the world. This is to say, *he was really a man of the world, and not a man about town*—a very important distinction which the latter usually overlooks.

The worldly success which he proclaimed as the prime end of existence was, so far as it went, success of the best kind. It was not that sort of success which culminates in the accumulation of a great fortune, or in getting a seat or a promotion in the House of Peers, or in forcing yourself into the most exclusive set in London society. It was something much better than all these, because it required a greater amount than they require of those qualities whose exercise and development conduce most to happiness. Chesterfield's scheme of life omitted many of these qualities, but he ap-

pealed to a much finer set of motives than if he had made wealth the end of life, or mere social distinction at dinner-parties and routs. "To make a figure" was his untechnical phrase for the aim which he recommended his son to place before himself. The distinction which was thus held up meant political power and popularity as much as it meant any one thing. And the difficulty of the conditions of attaining it is never blinked. Prodigious and untiring industry, minute attention under all circumstances, the most vigilant and universal conciliatoriness, a generous ambition,—these are among the requirements of a large sort of worldly success, and Chesterfield never tires of enjoining them.

That ferocious and famous epigram as to the two characters whose manners and morals respectively the Letters inculcate, has blinded people to the self-denial and diligence which would have to be practised by the Chesterfieldian disciple. Because he said that of the two he would rather have his son a fop than a sloven, it has been argued, with odd logic, that Chesterfield valued fopperies more than solid qualities of character. Yet every other letter contains an injunction not to be a smatterer. "Go to originals whenever you can, and trust to copies and descriptions as little as possible." The little intervals of otherwise idle time are to be occupied by taking up "Bayle's, Moreri's, and other

dictionaries," and the example is actually recommended of a gentleman who got through the whole of the Latin poets in moments which the most assiduous might fairly leave unoccupied, and which modern delicacy forbids us to describe. "Whatever you do, do it to the purpose; do it thoroughly, not superficially; *approfondissez*: go to the bottom of things."

With the incurious temper that stares instead of examining, Chesterfield had no patience. He insists that his son shall never tire of asking questions about everything that he sees. If it is a court of justice, he is earnestly desired to acquaint himself with its jurisdiction; and if it is a college or an academy, with its rules, its members, and its endowments, and not merely with the dimensions of the respective edifices. If he sees a regiment, he must learn all about the number of its troops and companies and officers; who provide pay and clothing, the mode of recruiting, and so on. Writing to young Stanhope in Paris, he asks, "If you go to *les Invalides* do you content yourself with seeing the building, the hall where three or four hundred cripples dine, and the galleries where they lie? or do you inform yourself of the numbers, the conditions of their admission, their allowance, the value and nature of the fund by which the whole is supported? This latter I call seeing, the former is only staring." And, again, he says that "many

people take the opportunity of *les vacances* to go and see the empty rooms where the several Chambers of the Parliament did sit, which rooms are exceedingly like all other large rooms; when you go there let it be when they are full; see and hear what is doing in them; learn their respective constitutions, jurisdictions, objects, and methods of proceeding; hear some causes tried in every one of the different Chambers." And then comes the often repeated, "*Approfondissez les choses.*" Nothing stirs up Chesterfield's contempt more profoundly than the silly shallow generalizations which coxcombs, in his day as in our own, wished to pass off for wit and philosophy combined. He more than once warns his son against "the false wit and cold raillery" which these foolish pretenders indulge in about religion, marriage, and most other institutions held in common respect. If he had been giving advice to a man reading for a double-first or a wranglership, he could not have spoken more practically or sensibly than when he warned him against haste and hurry. "A man of sense takes the time necessary for doing the thing he is about well, and his haste to dispatch a business only appears by the continuity of his application to it; he pursues it with a cool steadiness, and finishes it before he begins any other." Of course, like much of what is best in Chesterfield, this is commonplace, but it is more so now than it was

then, and at any time it is really *good commonplace*. It represents the man of the world on his best and most useful side.

Some of what he says on points of purely intellectual culture would scarcely be said by a man of equivalent mental size at the present day. When he recommends his son to study history, he is very careful to explain that he does not mean "the jimcrack natural history of fossils, minerals, plants, etc., but the useful political and constitutional history of Europe for these last three-and-a-half centuries." The same disrespect as that in which he holds such jimcrack sciences as botany and geology he has also for music—or "piping and fiddling," as he habitually styles it—which he considers an illiberal pleasure. Sculpture and painting he recommends as connected with history and poetry; but piping and fiddling "are connected with nothing that I know of but bad company." "If you love music, pay fiddlers to play to you; but I insist upon your neither piping nor fiddling yourself."

At first this seems simply a mark of the eighteenth century, but one can scarcely say this on reflecting how very generally it is still thought effeminate for a man to play the piano. So extremely stupid a notion is, we fear, an English peculiarity, just as it is a peculiarity of schoolboys to believe that poetry is a thing only fit for girls. Chesterfield on poetry



is still more unlike what the same sort of man would say in the present century than Chesterfield on music. Some of his criticism on Homer is very funny indeed. He expresses his aversion to the "porter-like language" of the heroes, and he declares that "Homer's hero, Achilles, was both a brute and a scoundrel, and consequently an improper character for the hero of an epic poem; he had so little regard for his country, that he would not act in defence of it, because he had quarrelled with Agamemnon about a mistress; and then afterwards, animated by private resentment only, he went about killing people basely, I will call it, because he knew himself invulnerable; and yet, invulnerable as he was, he wore the strongest armour in the world; which I humbly apprehend to be a blunder, for a horse-shoe clapped to his vulnerable heel would have been sufficient." This delicate appreciation and fine poetic sense was natural in a man who could not for the life of him make out why poets and orators should not be as great under a despotism as in a free State.

Still the creatures who think themselves Chesterfields because they despise books and ideas, and behave impudently and conceitedly in society, are a long way from the mark. There is an admirable lesson alike for full blockheads and for empty blockheads in the Letters. Their fundamental doctrine is that "a man who cannot join business and plea-

sure is either a formal coxcomb in the one, or a sensual beast in the other," and, considering the tendency of character of any sort to run to extremes, this is a lesson which can hardly be too often repeated and impressed. It is the stress which he lays on the importance of steering a just middle course between pedantry and foppery which makes Chesterfield's Letters so right, where volumes of precepts for the manufacture of prigs, like Todd's 'Student's Manual' for example, are so exceedingly wrong and unwise.

It would be superfluous to dwell at length on the immorality of the Letters, both because this is the aspect on which everybody has fastened too exclusively, and because the surface immorality of the book is not its worst trait. There is a certain grossness which shocks the more fastidious delicacy of this age, in the way in which the father, with something of a snigger, almost enjoins upon his son the practice of a gentlemanly gallantry with any of the ladies of his acquaintance, as well as in the perseverance with which he points out that coarser forms of vice are objectionable on grounds quite distinct from the fact that they are coarse or vicious or anti-social or degrading. Many profoundly enlightened observers of modern life, however, are strongly of opinion that a father does more injury by a careless reticence with his son, than Chesterfield could do by his too frank recog-

nition of the perils which beset youth in this direction. Few fathers could endure, as Chesterfield did, to banter a lad of nineteen about his eternal passion which might last three months; but it may be admitted that the reserve and stiffness which prevents so many fathers from making their sons their friends is the source of deep mischief which might be avoided by the opposite course. In other parts of the book, there is no sort of excuse to be made for Chesterfield, and the only wonder is that his shrewdness and common sense did not supply the place of high integrity. When, for example, to take a well-known instance, he encloses to his boy a letter with directions that the boy is to copy it and forward the copy as his own composition, so that the person to whom it was addressed might admire his elegance and style, the curious thing is that Chesterfield should not have felt that deceitfulness of this sort was sure to recoil upon himself. He reaped the fruit of the seed which he had thus sown, twenty-one years after this vile trick, when he found out, on his son's death, that he had for some years been concealing with much art and industry the fact that he was married and had two children. On mere Chesterfieldian principles, he ought to have seen that to teach a boy deceitful and disingenuous arts is worse than a crime; it is a blunder.

Not a few precepts of this kind in the art of

petty deception are of a kind which many persons, who would not be at all too virtuous to wish their sons to practise them, would still be too virtuous deliberately to write down and enjoin. There is, for example, "the innocent piece of art—that of flattering people behind their backs in the presence of those who, to make their own court, much more than for your sake, will not fail to repeat and even amplify the praise to the party concerned." There is some truth, again, in the proposition that "a steady assurance with seeming modesty is possibly the most useful qualification that a man can have in every part of his life." But we feel it to be a truth not wholesome for a lad, or for anybody else with an unformed character. This is the case with many of the apophthegms for which Chesterfield has been most blamed. They are true, and they are worth saying, but they are out of their right place in letters on education. Rochefoucauld's Maxims are an excellent account of the conduct of selfish people, and of all people so far as they are selfish. Still, no boy would be the better, but the worse, for reading them, on the same grounds on which Socrates, in the 'Republic,' is made to object to the use of the poets in education. And Chesterfield is bad reading for immature minds for the same reasons.

There is a superficial shrewdness, for instance, in saying that "women who are either indispu-

tably beautiful or indisputably ugly are best flattered upon the score of their understandings, but those who are in a state of mediocrity are best flattered on their beauty, or at least their graces; for every woman who is not absolutely ugly thinks herself handsome, but, not hearing often that she is so, is the more grateful and the more obliged to the few who tell her so; whereas a decided and conscious beauty looks upon every tribute paid to her beauty only as her due, but wants to shine and to be considered on the side of her understanding; and a woman who is ugly enough to know that she is so, knows that she has nothing left for it but her understanding, which is consequently (and probably in more senses than one) her weak side." Though flippant enough, this is not unentertaining to a man or woman who has seen life, but it was addressed to a boy sixteen years old.

"Take out the immorality," said Johnson of *Chesterfield's Letters*, "and the book should be put into the hands of every young gentleman." But after you have taken out all that Johnson meant by immorality, what remains turns too exclusively on the littleness and meanness of the world to be salutary for a "young" gentleman. It was Johnson's own robust grasp of the better part of human nature which made him such a shining moral light in *Chesterfield's* very dingy age; and it was his sym-



pathy, implied in the saying we have quoted, with the actual and existing society which Chesterfield had in view, that redeemed him from the dull oppressive pedantry of most moralists. He could relish his "frisk" with Beauclerk and Langton, and yet see that virtue is a much higher thing than vice can be, much more likely to bring happiness, and far more conformable therefore to reason and the law of right living. Chesterfield had no respect whatever for virtue, either in the modern sense or in the sense of a man like Johnson, and this is fatal to the worth of his Letters for the purpose for which they were written. Unless a young gentleman is much more firmly set in virtuous principle than young gentlemen usually are, the Letters are not likely to do him any good.

Chesterfield's fundamental fault is that of the man of the world in most times. He missed seeing that the important thing about a man, and the one aim of those who instruct him wisely in his youth, is his character. In other words, he thought more of seeming than of being, of reputation than of reality, of outside success than of internal elevation and calm. The Aristotelian virtue of High-mindedness had no place in his list of desirable qualities. No doubt he would not have thought any the worse of a man for acting invariably from eminently lofty and upright motives, and in this

respect even he was better than the man of the world of the inferior stamp. But he never could have regarded the consciousness of integrity and purity and high-mindedness as anything like an end in itself. Take the love of justice, for instance—an idea which it is perhaps the chief merit of the eighteenth century to have developed in greater perfection than had been possible at any other epoch, at least of modern times. Chesterfield would have sought the reputation of being just; he would have tried to do justice, because this is a virtue which promotes happiness, in a population, say, like that of Ireland, where one race and sect, both before and since Chesterfield's time, has oppressed a hostile race and sect. But probably he never thought of justice at all in its ennobling effect on the character of the just man. Like much greater and more famous philosophers than himself, he would have made the *standard* of justice its single *motive*. He could scarcely have realized to himself the notion of a man acting justly, without a deliberate and foreseeing eye to the effects of his just actions on the world outside. That one should pursue justice, as he pursues bodily health, simply and solely with a view to his own comfort and well-being, is an idea for which there could have been very little room in Chesterfield's mind. Here the professed and dogmatic moralist has the better of him, for he does

generally profess the doctrine that virtue is its own reward. Only you never can get the moralist to believe that virtue is subtle and many-shaped, and resides in a thousand unsuspected spots; and that there are proportionate and fitting rewards for each and all of its forms.











